

# THE MONTH

MARCH 1960

**A PHILOSOPHER ON TOUR**

FREDERICK C. COPLESTON

**THE PAINLESS HEROISM  
OF MR. COLIN WILSON**

SIR ARNOLD LUNN

**JOHN SCOTUS ERIGENA**

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# A PHILOSOPHER ON TOUR

By

FREDERICK C. COPLESTON

HAVING OFTEN WISHED to visit Scandinavia, I was pleased to have the opportunity of accepting an invitation from the Academicum Catholicum (which corresponds to the Newman Association in this country) to undertake a lecture-tour in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. A stay of about a month in these countries, during which period I lectured at Aarhus, Copenhagen, Lund, Stockholm, Uppsala, Göteborg and Oslo, certainly does not qualify me for writing as an authority on Scandinavia. However, one can hardly make such a tour without receiving some definite impressions. And they may possibly be of interest to some readers of *THE MONTH*. But I propose to confine myself more or less to my impressions of the philosophical situation. I do not propose to write about scenery or architecture or local customs, still less about food.

Before going to Scandinavia I had the general idea that philosophical thought there was commonly positivistic and anti-metaphysical in character. Indeed, some German friends told me that it was no use talking about metaphysics in the Scandinavian countries. The common indifference towards religious belief and practice, I was informed, went hand in hand with a lack of openness to the great problems of metaphysics. If I did talk about metaphysics, I should be wasting my time. I had better give factual and descriptive lectures on British philosophy, even if it turned out to be a case of carrying coals to Newcastle.

As regards my initial idea of the prevalence of a positivistic and anti-metaphysical attitude in university philosophical circles, I found it confirmed by experience. When I first started to talk against positivism, I felt rather embarrassed. For in this country logical positivism is looked on, at least by the more fashionable philosophers, as outmoded and overcome. And I feared that by

attacking it in its dogmatic form I might be flogging a dead horse, whose demise had already been noted. But I soon found that this feeling of embarrassment was quite unnecessary. For positivism of the type which is disclaimed by the Oxford philosophers is by no means dead in Scandinavia. I do not wish to exaggerate. In some cases I found that university professors who had been described to me as positivists were more akin to the English linguistic analysts than to the members of the Vienna Circle in its original form. And I do not suppose that they had any particular objection to an attack on logical positivism as a dogmatic system. But at a certain university I noticed, very soon after the start of my lecture, the evident annoyance of the professor of philosophy who had honoured me by his presence. I do not mean to imply that he behaved in any way rudely. He did not. But his reactions were unmistakable, even though he controlled their verbal expression. At first I was somewhat surprised, for he could hardly have expected a Catholic priest to defend positivism. But it then occurred to me that he had perhaps expected me to give him an opening for an obvious retort by caricaturing positivism or by refuting it on the grounds that it conflicted with Christian doctrine or with Thomist principles. And when he found that I was attacking positivism on grounds of intrinsic untenability and that I was depicting it as an attempt to find a theoretical justification for an attitude fostered by extra-philosophical factors in the cultural situation, he was not so pleased. Nor was he pleased, I imagine, by the picture of positivism as an antiquated position, inconsistent with the advances in linguistic analysis. In the subsequent discussion, which reminded me of the remarks and objections one could hear in an English university society before the so-called principle of toleration had come to prevail, the professor did his best to argue that any *intelligible* questions which I would call metaphysical could be answered by the sciences.

I do not mention this incident in order to give myself a pat on the back. I have no doubt that the situation could have been much better handled by many other people. My motive is rather that of illustrating the persistence in Scandinavian universities of a rather dismal, narrow and materialistic positivism. I use the word "materialistic" advisedly. In one university I had argued that the phenomenalist (Humian and Russellian) analysis of the self is

metaphysics, bad metaphysics but still metaphysics. A professor who was present wished to confine the use of the word "metaphysics" to theories which assert a spiritual reality or spiritual realities in addition to material beings. As he rejected metaphysics, it is quite obvious that it is not unfair to think of him as a materialist.

In one famous university I found marked resistance to the later Wittgenstein's ideas about language. This resistance was partly motivated, I think, by a devotion to the analysis of meaning and by realisation of the fact that it is difficult to speak of "the meaning" unless there is some standard or norm, provided by an ideal logical language. At the same time I could not help feeling, at least in the case of one well-known Scandinavian philosopher, that other considerations too played a part in prompting this resistance. If we consider the practice of, say, Professor Austin of Oxford in describing common linguistic usage, we shall hardly be inclined to regard it as a grave menace to religious faith or moral convictions. It does not undermine anything, except perhaps the initial interest in philosophy of those who come to the subject with the expectation of hearing something more exciting and who fail to undergo a conversion to the *mystique* of common usage. One can understand therefore if a philosopher who regards it as his business to undermine religious faith and belief in absolute objective values prefers Lord Russell's thought, in its more critical and destructive aspects, and the doctrine of *Language, Truth and Logic* to the more rarefied forms of Oxford philosophy.<sup>1</sup> This may sound like an uncharitable imputation of motives. But the fact remains that the Scandinavian philosopher in question is a mighty underminer. For instance, he has used Catholicism to attack and undermine the Lutheran position. That is to say, he has argued that from the rational point of view Catholicism is a far more coherent and a far better-grounded system than Lutheranism. But the matter does not rest there, of course. Catholicism is then subjected to attack. In particular, Catholic moral teaching is attacked on lines similar to Lord Russell's attacks on Christian ethics. In other words, if one compares Catholicism and

<sup>1</sup> I do not mean to imply that Bertrand Russell is, or ever has been, a logical positivist. But there are clearly aspects of his thought which can be used for undermining religious faith and belief in absolute moral values or for providing a theoretical justification of such unbelief where it already exists.

Lutheranism, one must admit that the former is much superior to the latter. For it does at least strive to provide some rational foundation for faith. At the same time a man of the twentieth century cannot possibly accept Catholic moral teaching, which in certain important respects does not square with Scandinavian practice. Obviously, if one wishes to indulge in this sort of criticism, one cannot derive much help from the later Wittgenstein or from the archpriests of what Mr. Gellner calls the High Church party in the linguistic movement. Professor Austin is indeed known and respected in Scandinavia. But it is understandable that for those who wish to attack religious belief and Christian ethics (mainly sexual ethics, of course) Lord Russell should be much more of a hero than Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Let me repeat that I do not wish to exaggerate. I certainly do not wish to give the erroneous impression that all Scandinavian professors of philosophy are concerned with undermining religious belief and firm moral convictions. Such a sweeping accusation would constitute a calumny. For the matter of that, I do not intend to imply that all Scandinavian university professors of philosophy are positivists. My attention was drawn, for example, to the two volumes by the Finnish Professor Sven Krohn<sup>1</sup> in which he criticises logical positivism. But, generally speaking, the atmosphere prevailing in the philosophical faculties is positivistic.

The serious aspect of the situation seems to me to be this. Students, especially those who have not studied abroad in countries where they become acquainted with other lines of thought, know of no rational alternative to positivism. (I use the word here in a fairly general sense.) In the circumstances it is practically inevitable that they should look on positivism as *the* modern idea. If they have no initial belief in God and in a universally-obligatory moral law, they find this unbelief confirmed by their professors. If they had some initial belief, it tends to be undermined. Hence any attempt to shake their assumptions about the tenability of positivism, to broaden their horizons by opening up "ultimate problems" and to give them a hint at any rate of a rationally respectable alternative to materialism and positivism and ethical relativism has, from the Christian point of

<sup>1</sup> *Der logische Empirismus. Eine kritische Untersuchung.* Annales Universitatis Turkuensis, Turku, 1949 and 1950.



view, an apostolic aspect of great importance. A Catholic thinker can, of course, go to Scandinavia and confine himself in his lectures to exact scholarship, to expounding, that is to say, the results of his learned researches. And this can obviously be of use. For one thing it can tend to increase the prestige in which the Church is held. But as far as philosophy is concerned I am convinced that the aim of the Christian philosopher should be twofold; first, to pierce the positivistic armour and, secondly, to convey the idea of a philosophical alternative which will not leave faith as a mere irrational leap or as a wishful thinking which lacks any rational justification. In an occasional lecture or two it is obviously impossible to develop the matter at length. But if one can let at least a little fresh air into some of the students' minds, one's time and trouble have certainly not been wasted. It must be remembered that in the case of a public lecture in a university practically the entire audience will be non-Catholic. A large number will probably be agnostic or atheist. And ideas which are common enough in, say, France or Germany will be news to them.

Well, what about the receptivity of the students? Are they open to "ultimate problems"? This is obviously an important question for any lecturer who endeavours, as I did (except on the occasions when I was carrying coals to Newcastle by talking about British thought), to show the untenability of the old positivism, to discuss linguistic analysis and, by way of analysis, to open up a path to a line of thought which goes beyond such analysis and leads to the appropriation of the idea of the Transcendent.

In the first place, of course, we are all human beings. And in any nation there are at least some people who are open to metaphysical and religious problems. And it is only to be expected that some of them should be found in the ranks of those whose professed business it is to think and reflect. However, having uttered these somewhat platitudinous remarks I can go on to suggest that the incidence of openness to such problems may have some connection with national character and outlook. I am only too conscious that I am treading here on very dangerous ground. For one thing, a few weeks' stay in Scandinavia is not sufficient to justify dogmatic pronouncements on such a matter. For another thing, there is the danger of causing offence. However, I am in



any case dealing with my impressions; and I give them for what they may be worth.

It can hardly be claimed, I think, that the Danes are passionately addicted to philosophical or religious problematics. At Copenhagen I visited the grave of Kierkegaard. But I did not feel that if the father of existentialism were to return to this earthly life, he would find much ground for rejoicing in the spiritual progress of his fellow-countrymen. As this remark may be taken amiss, I hasten to add that, as far as liking is concerned, I felt strongly attracted by this friendly, polite, hospitable and charming people. I felt at the end of my tour that if I had to choose one of the three capitals I visited as a place of residence, I should choose Copenhagen. The Danes are remarkably tolerant. The Government gives generous financial aid to the Catholic schools, as well as to the schools of some other "recognised bodies." And during my stay in Denmark I was never conscious of any hostility towards me as a priest and Jesuit. But the general tolerance is not perhaps altogether unconnected with the widespread indifference to religion and religious problems. And indifference to religion is clearly not a fertile soil for a passionate interest in the great problem of metaphysics, not at any rate if one regards the problem of the Absolute, of God, as the chief problem of metaphysics. I do not say this because of any feeling of dissatisfaction with my audiences. In the university of Aarhus I spoke to some hundred and fifty students, and one could not have wished for a more attentive audience. And the professors whom I met there were most friendly and charming. But it would, I think, require a bold man to assert that the metaphysical approach to truth exercises any powerful fascination for the Danish mind. Denmark is not Germany.

In Sweden the situation is perhaps rather different. It cannot indeed be claimed that religion is in a very flourishing condition or that metaphysical interests are much in evidence in the philosophical faculties of the universities. Far from it. At the same time the tendency to what our analytical friends, with their passion for maintaining a low temperature, are inclined to call "puzzlement" is perhaps more marked among the Swedes than among the Danes. On several separate occasions I asked different Swedes whether they thought that films such as *The Seventh Seal* really represented anything in the Swedish character,

whether, that is to say, the Swedes were at all inclined to brood over problems concerning the meaning or meaninglessness of human existence, and so on. And the answers I received were all more or less the same, namely that though it would be absurd to suppose that such films expressed the mentality of every Swede, they did none the less express or respond to something in the Swedish character or temperament. My informants seemed to think that in this respect the Swedes were more "serious" and less light-hearted than the Danes.<sup>1</sup> Some outside observers voiced the same opinion. I cannot say that I was struck by any passion for metaphysical problematics among the university students with whom I came in contact. But I was told that the main interest in religious and metaphysical problems was to be found outside university circles, sometimes in unexpected quarters. Given the character of Swedish philosophy, there would be nothing odd in this, of course.

The tour ended in Norway. It was only very recently that the Norwegian parliament repealed a stringent anti-Jesuit law. Yet the university of Oslo formally invited me to give, and paid me for giving, two lectures in the philosophical faculty. And I think that this signal open-mindedness deserves to go on record. In Switzerland the paragraph of the constitution which severely restricts the activities of the Jesuits in the religious and educational fields is still in force, though the Communists, who might reasonably be considered a greater danger to the Swiss constitution, can exercise their activities freely and legally. In Norway, however, a country which, unlike Switzerland, is almost entirely non-Catholic, the university of the capital was prepared to welcome a Jesuit. It may be said that the comparison is unfair. For the Swiss federal parliament is unable to repeal the anti-Jesuit law on its own initiative. There would have to be a plebiscite. This is true. At the same time it is also true that Switzerland discriminates against a minority-group, namely the Society of Jesus, while Norway does not. And the present writer would like to express his sincere appreciation of Norwegian generosity, tolerance and openmindedness.

As my two lectures in the university were given consecutively, with only a short interval between them, I was able to develop

<sup>1</sup> I am aware, of course, of the high suicide-rate in Denmark. But I do not think that this is the result of any constitutional melancholy in the Danish character.

my theme of positivism, analysis and metaphysics at some length and in an uninterrupted manner. The professor who introduced me very kindly invited me to hold a seminar or discussion-class for students on the following day. This lasted for two hours. A few students wished to have a further private session. But my programme made this impossible to arrange.

At a lecture on Sartre in the series run by the Dominican Fathers in Oslo the audience numbered about a hundred and fifty, four-fifths of whom would be non-Catholic. The hearers were predominantly young, and I noticed a number of students who had attended my lectures in the university. The lecture was, of course, in English. At the lectures in Norwegian the number of hearers is often very much higher. And the majority are always non-Catholic. It is evident that there is very considerable interest in Catholic thought and belief. I do not mean to suggest that there is a rush of conversions to the Catholic Church. But of the existence of an interest there can be no doubt.

My few days in Oslo gave me the impression that some at least of the students in Norway are only too glad to hear of some rational alternative to positivism. I do not suppose for a moment that they would be particularly interested in high-and-dry scholastic metaphysics as such. It would be extremely surprising if they were. But there does seem to be a certain measure of openness to metaphysical problems in so far as they are obviously connected with the great problems of religion and human existence. I also noticed that there appears to be rather more interest in existentialism at Oslo than I had come across elsewhere in Scandinavia. I do not intend to suggest that the existentialists are conspicuous for success in solving problems. But they are alive to them. And an interest in existentialism may very well be a sign of openness to the problems with which the existentialists deal. Indeed, it could hardly be anything else.

It is worth drawing attention, I think, to the embarrassing situation in which the Lutheran theologians find themselves in regard to the rational foundations of belief, especially in view of the general character of philosophical thought in Scandinavia. Some of them at least are very much concerned with this problem. At Uppsala, where I gave two lectures, I found that I had been billed to give one of them on the relation between reason and belief in God. Among the audience there were some Lutheran

clergymen and students; and whatever they may have thought about the contents of my talk they were certainly not uninterested in the topic. At the discussion-class which I conducted in the university of Oslo a young student spoke more or less as follows: "People are saying that Catholicism is much superior to Protestantism in that it has a philosophy and insists on the rational basis of faith. But I do not agree with this. I do not see why we should not use the sort of philosophy represented by Ockham and his successors. What do you think about this?" I pointed out that though one can trace some connection between the thought of Ockham and his successors on the one hand and Luther's theology on the other, it is arguable that Ockhamism in a modern setting becomes positivism, and that it is questionable whether positivism can serve the sort of purpose which the young man had in mind. I then left the topic, as I considered that it would be highly improper to use the occasion of a philosophical seminar to indulge in criticism of Protestantism or in specifically Catholic propaganda. But the incident impressed itself upon my mind as indicating the need for a philosophy or at least for a rational "apologetics" which is now being felt by some Lutherans, and as helping to explain the evident interest in Catholic philosophy and thought.

In my opinion, therefore, the Catholic philosopher who lectures in Scandinavia need by no means feel that he is ploughing a barren soil, certainly not in Norway and Sweden. True, in one sense he may not accomplish very much. But he will certainly meet with a response in some minds. And if it is only in a few cases that he succeeds in shaking the belief in positivism and materialism, or in strengthening people's doubts about the sufficiency of positivism when the doubts are already there, or in encouraging them to look elsewhere for intellectual satisfaction, the time and trouble which he may have expended will be well rewarded.

This article is egoistic in character, in the sense that it is confined to a selection of my impressions in my capacity as a lecturer on philosophical topics in Scandinavia. I have therefore refrained from writing about the work and needs of the Church in the Scandinavian countries, the rate and prospects of conversions, the moral difficulties standing in the way of any widespread movement towards the Church, and similar topics. In the field of work

among university students I have alluded at least to the invaluable labours of the Dominican Fathers at Oslo. I might also have mentioned the activity of Fr. H. Roos, S.J., who lectures in the university of Copenhagen, the work of the Dominican Fathers at Lund, the admirable patience and self-sacrifice with which the Jesuit Fathers J. Gerlach and W. Köster have developed their work at Uppsala, and so on. But unfortunately I could not dwell on these themes in the present article. However, I should like to end by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to the leaders of the Academicum Catholicum in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, to all the priests and religious who showed me unfailing kindness and hospitality, to the professors who welcomed me in the various universities where I lectured, despite the difference between their views and mine, and to all those who contributed to make my stay in Scandinavia both pleasurable and informative. As the tour drew to a close I found myself wishing, rather absurdly it is true, that I could have had at the beginning even that very limited experience of the philosophical situation which I had gained in the previous weeks. I felt that I was ending at the point where I ought to begin. And I was only too conscious of lost opportunities. But I am in any case convinced that lectures by a Christian philosopher to general audiences of Scandinavian students possess, or rather can possess, an apostolic aspect which makes the work very well worth while.

## THE PAINLESS HEROISM OF MR. COLIN WILSON

By

SIR ARNOLD LUNN

MR. COLIN WILSON'S LATEST BOOK<sup>1</sup> is an attempt to develop the theme of *The Lonely Crowd* by David Reisman of Harvard, who distinguishes between three types of men: the inner-directed man whose behaviour is largely determined

<sup>1</sup> *The Age of Defeat*, by Colin Wilson (Gollancz 16s).



by his own conception of what is right, the other-directed man whose ambition is to conform to what his neighbours expect, and the tradition-directed man. Mr. Wilson urges us to resist mass pressures and to become heroes. The theme of his opening chapter is "the Vanishing Hero," and he makes it clear that he is repelled by the fashionable modern "cult of the ordinary chap." And yet his own phenomenal success is mainly due to this cult. The century of the Common Man would also seem to be the century of the Common Thinker. The title of this book, *The Age of Defeat*, is faintly reminiscent of *The Decline of the West*, and Mr. Wilson's popular success after the Second World War was comparable with that of Spengler's after the First World War, a fact which is in itself significant of a certain deterioration of standards. Spengler was not only one of the most erudite but also one of the most original thinkers of this century, but it would be difficult to suggest any idea which Mr. Wilson has originated, and though he has read widely his many misquotations, summarised some time ago in a long letter to *The Times Literary Supplement*, irritate the scholarly. His own public, however, are unperturbed for they do not read *The Times Literary Supplement*. What they want is what Mr. Wilson so admirably provides, a popular digest of contemporary thought by "an ordinary chap." The populariser of philosophy has an important rôle to play at a time when it is difficult to lure people from television, and it is not the least of Mr. Wilson's merits that he may in time succeed to the position of that great populariser, the late C. E. M. Joad. In time, for Joad took a First in Greats, but Mr. Wilson is an insatiable reader and he is still young.

Mr. Wilson, like Joad, is immensely readable and his comments on contemporary writers are often shrewd and never dull, and one is therefore all the more conscious of the transition when he tries to exchange the rôle of a commentator for the rôle of a creative thinker. What, for instance, could be woollier than his own attempt to define the modern hero?

Ultimately, the hero is the man who lives constantly out of a sense of his own freedom; his "commitment" to the world is nourished by his "inwardness," and his inwardness is constantly strengthened through being reflected back from society. Such a man would recognise all life as sacred, as all is involved in the same struggle towards expression.

Elsewhere he assures us that the hero must concentrate "upon his intuitions of *his own value*" (italics mine). He must reject "the automatic assumption that belief in oneself is a form of self-delusion." He need not apparently believe in God provided he believes in himself. Little more is required of the hero than to reject the cult "of the ordinary chap" and to have faith in himself as an extraordinary chap.

"Let a man," wrote Spengler, "be either a hero or a saint. In between lies not wisdom but banality." The hero and the saint have one thing in common: the asceticism which involves the conquest of the flesh. Asceticism takes many forms, such as a vow of celibacy, or the calm courage of an infantry officer leading a company through a barrage, or the readiness to endure hardship and risk injury to life or limb which characterises all ascetic sports, such as mountaineering. There is indeed a closer connection than Mr. Wilson might suspect between "the vanishing hero"—vanishing, that is, from the works of fashionable modern writers—and the vanishing ascetic. I doubt if Mr. Wilson has any understanding of what Catholics mean by "heroic virtue," a form of heroism which helps to redeem a world poisoned by the teachings of the amoralists. That chastity is as unattainable as it is undesirable is an assumption which many of those moderns, whom Mr. Wilson admires, would not dispute. Mr. Wilson might indeed have devoted a chapter to the cad as hero, and asked himself whether the immense popularity of plays such as *Look Back in Anger* and *Room at the Top* is not due to the increasing proportion of cads in the modern world.

The flight from asceticism finds expression not only in the flight from chastity but also in the belittlement of physical courage. Between the wars the vanity of those who had evaded or been born too late to experience the asceticism of front-line service in war found solace in the Blimp cartoons, which made it easier for them to despise those whom in fact they secretly admired, for, as Samuel Johnson says, "Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier. The profession of soldiers has the dignity of danger." But there is no place for "the dignity of danger" in Mr. Wilson's conception of the hero. "It is true," he admits sadly, "that there is a strong modern tendency to admire physical courage."



We read about men who crossed the Pacific on a raft or climbed Everest or Nanga Parbat. But somehow these men seem out of date in the age of the Organisation and mass production, as irrelevant as those brown daguerrotypes of the early motor cars. The pleasure they give is the pleasure of turning away from the present and imagining an age when they were relevant.

Courage will never be out of date or irrelevant. "One often meets," wrote René Quinton in *Soldier's Testament*, "in civil life men who are extraordinarily brave on the platform. Their principles are rigid, their language uncompromising. They pontificate, attack and inveigh. But such men are worth very little in war." Mr. Wilson's conception of the hero has much in common with the men who "are extraordinarily brave on a platform," but authentic heroism is unthinkable without authentic courage, and it is difficult to discover what more Mr. Wilson demands of his hero than a readiness to back his "intuitions of his own value"; but this kind of painless heroism is a fake, for the test of heroism is the readiness to suffer for one's convictions, to endure pain and hardship or at least unpopularity.

I wish that Mr. Wilson could be induced to devote part of his time set apart for reading to writers less ephemeral than Sartre, Camus and other purveyors of contemporary fashion in thought. He is, I believe, looking for the truth and might find what he seeks if he could be persuaded to extend the scope of his reading. His unfamiliarity with what is still the established religion of his country emerges in the odd remark that "the chief American contribution to culture in the past thirty years has been 'the higher criticism.'" He should take time off from the study of Sartre to discover what is meant by "the higher criticism" and the relevance of such criticism to Biblical studies. Himself a product of a provincial Protestant culture, he has little understanding of the religion which gave Europe her greatest architecture and noblest art and he has no appreciation of the organic relationship between religion and culture. A man's beliefs inevitably colour what he writes and what he paints and what he carves, and it would be difficult to imagine a crasser misunderstanding of the motives which inspire Mr. Greene and Mr. Waugh than the sentence: "Greene and Waugh take care to give the public what it wants, and to slip in their propaganda at a level where it will hardly be noticed." Even Mr. Wilson would feel there was some-

thing wrong about a sentence which read: "Chaucer and Dante took care to give the public what it wanted and to slip in their propaganda at a level where it would hardly be noticed."

What encourages me to hope that Mr. Wilson, whose talents I respect, may some day write something which will be of service to his generation is that he is acute enough to realise the futility of life if life be all.

Shaw saw clearly that the problem of the hero lies in the fact that nothing a man can do outlasts his own life, that death makes all achievement seem futile. An age of belief could set its hopes on heaven, while liberal humanism contented itself with phrases that concealed the defeat: "a man lives in his descendants," "an artist's life begins after his death," etc. But with the reality of death and corruption hanging over life, the question "What shall we do with our lives?" has no more importance than "Do you prefer light ale or brown?"

Mr. Wilson is not easily duped by the verbiage which masks the fact of death, but there is no evidence in this book that he has ever made a conscientious attempt to discover whether there is any evidence for the supernatural in general and immortality in particular. The truth is that Mr. Colin Wilson is an other-directed man so far as the supreme problem is concerned. He accepts with uncritical faith the negative conclusions of his entourage. But it is never too late to become inner-directed and to form one's own conclusions on the available evidence for or against the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. There is no reason why Mr. Wilson should acquiesce in intellectual defeat merely because he believes himself to be living in an Age of Defeat.

# JOHN SCOTUS ERIGENA

By

JEAN-MARIE DÉCHANET

IN THE YEAR 850, an Irishman appeared at the court of Charles the Bald. His name was John, but he was called Scotus Eriugena<sup>1</sup>—a pleonasm, for the first name means Irish as well as Scottish, and the second, native of Erin or Eriu. John was a member of the Palatine School, the title given to the Emperor's academy of scholars. Charlemagne had gathered together at Aachen, Peter of Pisa, Paul the Deacon, Paulinus of Aquileia, and Eginpard; and Louis the Pious, his son, added Claudius and Clement the Irishman. It is during the reign of Charles the Bald, who held court at Quierzy-sur-Oise, in the Ile-de-France, that we come upon John Scotus in this galaxy. Whether he came of his own accord, or because the Emperor sent for him, we do not know; but very probably he had previously been a member of the Irish colony at Laon. At any rate, Ireland remained true to her custom of sending her choicest spirits to Gaul.

John at once made a name for himself, and was spoken of as "the famous Irishman at court." Then and afterwards he had many disciples—Martin the Irishman, "Master of the Schools of Laon," Heiric d'Auxerre, Remi d'Auxerre. At the beginning of his career he was a layman; later he became a deacon, and perhaps was ordained priest, though we do not know for certain. He began by teaching "grammar," the medieval term for profane learning, and his *Annotatio in Martianum Capellam* has come down to us, as well as a few commentaries (probably not authentic) and some poems on the Life and Passion of Christ, dedicated to Charles the Bald.

In 851, Scotus became involved in a controversy concerning Predestination. A wandering monk, Godescalc, had written a treatise in which he maintained that God predisposed men to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dom M. Cappeluyns, *John Scot Erigène sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*. Louvain, 1933.

A. Forest, *La Synthèse de Jean Scot Erigène*, in *Historie de l'Eglise* (Fliche et artin), Paris, t. XIII, pp. 9 et seq.

evil and to hell, as well as to good and to heaven. At the request of Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims, Scotus replied with a formal refutation. But the extreme position he adopted shocked the theologians; he ended by denying that there was any such thing as predestination at all. He insisted on a metaphorical interpretation of any texts in Scripture or the Fathers which affirmed either predestination to good, or a divine justice that punished the guilty. It is only the feebleness of human language which leads us to talk of prescience and predestination; in God, these two activities are not distinct. The book was condemned, and Hincmar did not seek credit for inspiring it; even though, compared with Ratramnus, Loup de Ferrière, Prudentius de Troyes, Florus and Remi de Lyon, the Archbishop of Rheims was in favour of some degree of emancipation from the more sombre formulas of St. Augustine. Indeed, Godescalc had been only too logical in their application.

This was no more than a passing episode in Scotus's life. He acquired his following not as a controversialist but as a translator. From his pen we have a Latin version of the writings of the Pseudo-Denys, translated from the Greek at the instance of Charles the Bald; a translation of the *Ambigua* of St. Maximus the Confessor; and of *De Structura Hominis* of St. Gregory of Nyssa. These translations had great influence in the Middle Ages, for John Scotus did more than merely translate his favourite authors; he became their champion. Through his lengthy studies of their works, the Greek Fathers became something of an obsession with him; and he set himself the task of showing how useful it would be to have recourse to their writings in defending and expounding the faith. This was his precise aim in his commentaries on the Pseudo-Denys,<sup>1</sup> and the Gospel of St. John, which survives only in fragments,<sup>2</sup> and in his masterpiece, *De divisione naturae*, which we shall discuss later on.

Erigena's was an age when St. Augustine, through countless popularisations, reigned supreme, when this contact with the Greek Fathers was in the nature of a revelation for Erigena. We can understand his enthusiasm when we think of the narrow confines of sacred science in his day, reduced to interpretations of St. Augustine that were one-sided when they were not downright exaggerated, like Godescalc's.

<sup>1</sup> Migne, *Patres Latini*, cxxii, 126-284.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 283-348.

To discover another and more optimistic anthropology than Augustine's, above all to discover the negative theology of the Pseudo-Denys, which opened up fresh perspectives on the mystery of God; all this was highly exhilarating for a mind as inquiring and open as Erigena's. He set about doing for the West what the Greek Fathers and the Pseudo-Denys had done for the East—providing a synthesis of Neo-Platonism and Christian thought. Audacious though the project was, Erigena was partially successful. But he was ahead of his time. His contemporaries were not equal to understanding what he was trying to do, and his system, as such, was disregarded. Yet in spite of his having no immediate successors, his ideas did have a profound influence, especially in the twelfth century, before they became so distorted that *De divisione naturae* was unreservedly condemned. It would be out of place here to analyse this work, condensed as it is and full of digressions, or to outline in any detail Erigena's system. I should like better to concentrate on a few of his ideas, and show how they constantly recur in the monastic writings of the twelfth century, restated, developed, and sometimes embellished.

But first, a word about the fate of the *De divisione naturae*. Before the twelfth century there was no word of criticism; rather, the book had a wide circulation and is to be found in many monasteries. "Numerous monks and scholastics," Honorius was to write in the bull of condemnation, "more interested in novelties than is expedient, are given to close study of this book." Of course, the dangers of such study did not go unrecognised. We quite often find marginalia in the manuscripts warning the reader to be on his guard for "there are some very obscure passages which could lead to confusion and error." But the main criticism made against Erigena from the beginning of the twelfth century is his undisguised preference for the Greek Fathers. Some of his critics cannot forgive him for it. As early as the ninth century Florus of Lyons calls him "an abominable heretic," simply because he resolutely avoided, in his treatise on predestination, the use of certain Augustinian formulae and propositions. In the twelfth century, sinister rumours began to circulate against the author of *De divisione naturae*. In a work refuting Peter Abelard, a Norman Abbot wrote: "This passage is borrowed, if I am not mistaken, from Maximus, a Greek, whom John Scotus copied to the point of heresy." Elsewhere, William of Malmes-



bury, one of Erigena's defenders, says of him: "He has written a book which is certainly very useful in solving thorny problems. But he must be forgiven for what he says in some passages, because he is following the Greeks too closely and forsakes the path trodden by the Latins. This, incidentally, is the reason why he has been suspected of heresy."<sup>1</sup> William of St. Thierry who quotes him several times, never dares to mention him by name, but says simply: *dixit quidam servus tuus, Domine . . .*

The storm broke in the thirteenth century, when Amaury de Bene took up certain propositions from the *De divisione* which, torn from their context, were clearly unorthodox. Amaury's disciples went further. They drew from Erigena's work conclusions which he had certainly never thought of himself. For them, "Everything was God" and "God was everything." The reign of the Father (incarnated in Abraham) had given way to the reign of the Son (incarnated in Jesus); now the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit had come, the reign of love. The Amauricians were going the way of the Albigensians. They were condemned in 1210 at the Council of Paris, which ordered the burning of their books. Among these was a much-vaunted treatise on the nature of man; it was none other than the *De divisione*. In 1215, Pope Honorius III, without naming Erigena, ordered a thorough search to be made for copies of this book; they were all to be sent to Rome for burning. Erigena was suffering for the sin of another. Very few copies of the book escaped; its author's name was long coupled with that of Amaury. Erigena's system and ideas passed into oblivion. He had tried to bring about a marriage between Plotinus and the Gospel. The masters who succeeded him were less daring, perhaps, but they succeeded where he failed. The union of Aristotle and the Gospel is with us to-day.

Until comparatively recently, the name of Erigena was hardly ever mentioned except to draw attention to his errors—his rationalism, pantheism, agnosticism, and others; although several more impartial studies had appeared. Dom M. Cappeluy's work, while not strictly a rehabilitation, does show that Erigena's thought can be given a perfectly orthodox interpretation so long as it is read with sympathy, as was the case with many monastic writers and scholastic theologians in the twelfth century. What Erigena did was to broaden the horizons of Christian thought.

<sup>1</sup> P.L. clxxix, 1652.

His attempt to harmonise the Latin and Greek Fathers was a real service to the Church. He was indeed a bridge between East and West, and the literature of mysticism owes much to him. If he did not leave his stamp on theology proper, he did exercise a profound influence on the thought of certain theologians and spiritual writers. Unhappily, no study as yet exists which would enable us to assess the precise effect of Erigenism on the medieval Spirituals. The following pages are an attempt to fill this gap.

One of the most important facets of Erigena's system is his intellectualism. It enables us to see how Erigena and those he influenced differ from the Latin Fathers, at the same time professing the highest regard for them, and claiming to follow their spirit as well as their thought. The chief aim of the Latin Fathers in their search after truth was a pastoral one—to minister to souls and to combat heresy. Their teaching was intimately bound up with morals. Their disciples, during the first eight centuries of the Church, were less concerned with overcoming their own ignorance and arriving at Christ's Truth, sought after for its own sake, as an object of contemplation, than with finding a rule of life, a direct and certain way to salvation and eternal life. Erigena's aims are very different—the result, no doubt, of his long contact with the Greek Fathers; and in his expression of them he has no equal amongst the Contemplatives of the West, with the possible exception of Augustine in his rare neo-Platonic moments. His "Hymn to Truth" explains to us at length the nature of these "intellectualist" tendencies:

I cannot deny that in the past I have been led into error by the false reasonings of human opinion, so far from Truth. I did indeed accept these positions, seduced by an appearance of Truth and, as often happens, by the senses. But nowadays I am coming back little by little, guided by the Holy Fathers. I have been called back from my own errors and those of others and led along the straight way by the rays of divine light. God's goodness never permits those who follow the Truth with humility and reverence to lose their way in the darkness of ignorance. He will not allow them to fall into the snares of wrong opinions, there to perish. There is no worse death than not to know the truth, no deeper abyss than to mistake the false for the true. Here is the very essence of error; from this source flow forth in man's mind shameful and abominable figments, which the soul, a prisoner to the bodily sense, desires and pursues as if they were true. She turns her back on the light and



vainly tries to clutch fleeting shades. Thus she falls headlong into a gulf of misery. For this reason we must pray without ceasing: O God our Salvation and our Redemption, Thou hast given us our nature, give us also thy grace. Guide with thy light those who grope for Thee in the night of ignorance. Draw us away from error. Stretch out thy right hand to those who are weak, those who cannot, without Thee, advance towards Thee. Show thyself to those who ask for nothing besides Thee. Sweep away the clouds of vain imaginings which prevent the spirit from seeing Thee, though invisible, in the way in which Thou dost deign to reveal thyself to those who wish to gaze upon Thee face to face. These are they who seek their rest and goal, and beyond this have no desire; since nothing lies beyond the supreme and superessential good.<sup>1</sup>

Erigena is consumed, if one may use the phrase, by a thirst for knowledge, for strengthening his hold on reality, especially on God in the purity and simplicity of His Being, for advancing beyond imagination and conceptual knowledge. His intellectualism is emphatically not the kind which demands that faith should be dominated by reason. It is rather an aspiration for a higher order of knowledge, one that is itself sustained by faith. He wishes to make the fullest possible use of reason, with the aid of a special illumination from God, a divine gift which is never wanting to those who seek Him, in order to arrive at what he calls *Theoria*, *Altior ratio*, *Altior theoria*, *Contemplatio Theologica*. What does Erigena mean by these terms? To understand him, we have to take notice of his own system of psychology and the three distinct degrees of man's knowledge here below—from faith to the highest contemplation.

Here below, all true knowledge of the true God begins with faith. "Faith, in my opinion," he says, "is none other than the principle, a certain principle, from which knowledge of the Creator takes its rise in our rational nature."<sup>2</sup> It is first of all a sense knowledge, then a rational science and, finally, wisdom. Man is so constituted (and this for Erigena is an effect of sin) that he must have recourse to *sensus*, then to *ratio*, and at last to *intellectus*, which receives the divine illumination.

Simple faith has its beginnings in sense knowledge: *fides ex auditu*. For God, who is Truth, has enshrined Himself first and foremost in Sacred Scripture. It is there, by reading and hearing,

<sup>1</sup> P.L. cxxii, 649-50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 516.

that we must humbly look for Him, and find Him. In the following prayer which corresponds to his invocation to Truth, cited above, Erigena asks for grace to penetrate the meaning of the Scriptures:

O Lord Jesus, I ask for no other reward, no other blessing, no other joy, than to understand in a pure manner, without any error due to false speculation, Thy words inspired by Thy Holy Spirit. There indeed lies the summit of my happiness, the goal of perfect contemplation. Beyond that, even the most pure among rational souls will find nothing, since nothing is beyond. There is no place more fitting to seek thee than in Thy Words; nowhere art Thou found more clearly than in them. There is thy dwelling place, where Thou biddest those enter who seek Thee and love Thee. There will they find the spiritual banquet of true knowledge which Thou hast prepared for them; and going in before them, there Thou thyself shalt serve them.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, to find God it is not enough merely to read the Scriptures, or hear them read. The reason (*sensus interior*) must work on what the *sensus exterior* has taken in. But it remains true that everything must begin with the *sensus exterior*. This, for Erigena, as well as for a number of twelfth century Spirituals who followed him, is an effect of original sin. If Adam had not fallen he would have known God and Truth directly, without having to pass through the deceiving world of sense. And if God had not foreseen the Fall, He would not have given man the gift of sense knowledge. This is a weakness which makes manifest the inferiority of man's status compared with that of the angels; it is also the cause of many errors.

Sacred Scripture is like a field; we must till it and sow it, a laborious and difficult task. God has willed it so, and the Holy Spirit has thus disposed it:

Man must eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, the bread of God's word, and till the ground of Holy Scripture, covered with thorns and briars, that is, with a subtle complex of divine thoughts. Though there are no paths marked out, reason must stalk after wisdom with the steady tread of investigation, till she come upon the Lord's dwelling, the tabernacle of the God of Jacob. By constant and laborious study of Holy Scripture, under the guidance of divine grace, with its aid, co-operation and impetus, reason will recover

<sup>1</sup> P.L. cxxii, 1010.

that contemplation of Truth which was lost in the fall of the first man: and when she has found it again, she will delight in it, cherish it, dwell in it, and so find true repose.<sup>1</sup>

If we are to find the hidden God, we must ponder over all the various senses of Sacred Scripture. But we may hope to understand, and to arrive one day at wisdom, only if we start from simple faith (*simplicitas fidei*), which is based on the first, the literal meaning of Scripture: that is, on sense knowledge.

Erigena recognises another source of the knowledge of God besides the Scriptures—visible creation. He would hardly be a good Platonist if he did not apply himself to the text of St. Paul, "His invisible nature—His eternal power and divinity—has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." The created world is a great book which man is invited to read. Abraham did not have the Scriptures—yet he knew God through looking at the world and the heavens. One must not look askance at philosophical reasonings; for by this means—by way of cause and effect—man can arrive at a knowledge of the Invisible through the visible. This was Plato's method; St. Paul does not accuse him of having erred concerning the reasons for visible creation, but of not having searched sufficiently beyond creation to the author of all creation Himself. Here again Erigena sees a consequence of sin—in the fact that man cannot arrive at a knowledge of God and His infinite perfections except through creatures. The danger of error is even greater than it is where the Scriptures are concerned, because man is always liable to lose his way by attributing to God qualities He does not possess, by thinking of Him as an inferior nature, whereas there is nothing visible, nothing tangible about God, nothing strictly that can be thought of at all. God is not just *more* beautiful than the fairest body, *larger* than the greatest bulk. There is a complete *dissimilarity*, a complete disparity between God and bodies which occupy space. For us then, the danger will always be to attribute to God qualities which He does not possess. But in this very danger Erigena sees a means offered to man of getting outside himself. Even though he risks losing his way, remaining below the level of reality (in the thorns and briars mentioned above), man is invited to raise himself, with God's help, towards an ever higher, ever purer, ever simpler form of knowledge. For man, to know is to be made

<sup>1</sup> *De divisione naturae*, I, c. 744.

pure, to be stripped of everything which has shackled and encumbered him since the Fall, and through the Fall. To know is the return to Paradise, to that mode of knowing "face to face," which once was his. To know is a religious act, an ascent to God—in Erigena's own words a *reversio*, a return.

The second stage in this ascent is the work of reason. Reason carries us back to first causes, penetrating the mysterious world of "ideas," of creative "energies," making use of "theophanies" or manifestations of God. Reason's task is to apply various names to God, or rather to learn how to tell the meaning of the different names we apply to God. Reason must interpret Biblical metaphors correctly, and discern what is there expressed, under the cloak of human language.

Nothing can be said worthily about God. Hardly a single noun, verb, or any other part of speech can be used appropriately of God, in the strict sense. How indeed could visible signs, intimately dependent as they are on the material, manage to express exactly this Invisible Nature which has nothing to do with any bodily sense? Indeed, It so far surpasses all understanding, that the purest spirit can scarcely attain to it. And yet, ever since the Fall, poverty-stricken human reason has been labouring with these words, these visible signs, to suggest and give some sort of a hint of the sublime richness of the Creator.<sup>1</sup>

Human reason, then, has to apply to God whatever is most appropriate. Some words are adequate in part: the verb "to be," for example—God *is*. Indeed this is the only thing we can say about Him with complete truth. It is what He says of Himself: *Ego sum qui sum*. There are other words which express God's reality, but only to some extent: *essentia*, *veritas*, *bonitas*, *virtus*, *sapientia*, *scientia*. God is all these, certainly—so long as we remember that whilst He is all these, He is far more than all of them, infinitely more than all that these expressions convey to us.

Many words and symbols, words transposed from the human order to the divine, are foreign to the Divine Nature. This is the case with many metaphors in the Bible. The role of reason is to see and see clearly whatever can, in some way or other, reveal God or something that has to do with God. One of its resources is to apply to God "whatever is best in us, most essential to our nature: being, essence, truth, virtue, wisdom, and so on"; whilst

<sup>1</sup> P.L. cxxii, 390.

at the same time making it quite clear that God surpasses them all infinitely. He is these things in a way that we are not. He is goodness, wisdom, love, infinitely more and infinitely better than we can ever conceive. Above all, He *is* these things in a quite different way from us.<sup>1</sup> At the end of this task of purification, the reason perceives that God absolutely surpasses everything, and that whatever we can and must affirm of Him, He is something still better. It is at this point that reason reaches Wisdom..

Above sense and reason is the intellect. It is the upper chamber where God comes to meet man, who is moving towards Him by means of sense-knowledge and reason. Here is a terrace which opens on Heaven and the world of divine things, bathed in the rays of eternal light; here the mind is illumined; here the man of desire finds the true contemplation of God. According to Erigena, this contemplation is "a completely simple and supernatural knowledge." It does not consist in an effort to reach a definition of God, nor in reasoning which carries us back through a series of effects to the First Cause of all things. It is a knowledge which apprehends the divine Excellence itself; ordinary knowledge conceives of this Excellence only by limiting it.

This knowledge, simple beyond the nature of the soul itself, cannot be expressed in words (*interpellatione caret*); for the simple reason that no words can suffice adequately to represent God as He is, in His transcendence. He is not found in any essence, any substance, anything whatsoever which can be uttered or thought. He is above everything that exists, and above everything that does not exist. What He is cannot be defined in any way at all.<sup>2</sup>

Evidently, the soul does not arrive at this special knowledge all at once, but ascends to God by degrees. Its progress in this ascent is dependent on the purification which the knowledge of God itself effects, in proportion as the soul discards its former representations of God, based on sense and imagination. It gradually comes to realise that all its previous ideas of God were utterly inadequate. And yet such ideas contain in them something of God. Erigena called them "theophanies"—manifestations of God, a term which he inherited from the Pseudo-Denys, and one much in vogue in the twelfth century. It is because these theophanies have something of God in them, just as the created universe

<sup>1</sup> P.L. cxxii, 390-2.

<sup>2</sup> P.L. clxxxii, 572.



has, that visible things can lead us to Him who is Invisible. The precise purpose of visible creation is to reveal to us the majesty and immensity of the Divine Goodness, that this Goodness might receive the praise which is Its due.<sup>1</sup>

Physical creatures, then, are theophanies; and ideas, the manifestations in the intellect of eternal reasons and prime causes, these are more excellent theophanies. And when the special illumination is vouchsafed, as will ordinarily be the case with those who seek God with a pure heart, there are further divine manifestations, progressively higher and more simple.

It should be noted that this progress in purification takes place in the context of the life of faith. The most sublime idea of God which the human mind, illuminated by grace, can conceive, will still coincide in content with what faith and the scriptures reveal to us of God's mystery. "I am who am," "My Father and I are one," all that is taught in the Prologue of St. John, all this the soul will see and grasp with an ineffable clarity. But before reaching this wisdom, this supernatural knowledge directly infused by God in a theophany differing in kind from the rest, the soul must have passed through the discursive, logical processes of "science," and the laborious, humble way of faith, *simplicitas fidei*. "It is through faith that one begins to understand"—Erigena brings new lights to this teaching in affirming strongly the continuity and the intimate connection between *fides* and *intellectus*. This is not to say that there is not a considerable distance between them which only divine grace can bridge.

The summit of contemplation—the gift of wisdom—lies in the awareness that God effectively surpasses all science; that, in His transcendence, He is absolutely none of those things which we affirm of Him. There are two theologies, both true, both exact, both of them necessary. The first proceeds from effects to causes, and to the Cause of all things. It applies to God the best of what it has found in His handiwork. It says of God that He is Essence, Truth, Goodness, Wisdom, Justice, Light, etc., and that *quasi proprie*; for even while it is so affirming, theological reason knows that nothing can, properly speaking, be affirmed of God, since He surpasses all intellect and all expression, whether of sense or intellect. The same theological reason applies a host of images to God. Erigena thinks that the simpler, cruder metaphors—like

<sup>1</sup> P.L. cxxii, 952.

those of the Bible—are the more fitting. Why? Because simple souls are less likely to be led astray by them. They are less tempted to mistake these representations for reality than if they had to deal with loftier comparisons. It is quite clear that one and the same theological reason, while affirming with all its strength, must in the very same breath vigorously deny. When it says that God is Goodness, essential goodness, it means the word to be taken in an infinitely loftier sense than the one we normally give to it. We have an idea of goodness; but however pure and lofty that notion of ours may be it must fall short of grasping the reality of God. Hence we must deny that God is goodness, truth, justice.

When you have got hold of reason's way of looking at things, you will see clearly that these two theologies which seem to be so contrary, far from being opposed in any way, are in the most perfect harmony. Let us give an example which will make this clear. Positive theology says "God is Truth"; negative theology says "God is not Truth." The first does not say that the divine substance is, properly speaking, truth, but only that one can use this metaphor drawn from creatures to speak of the Creator. The second says that God is not truth. It recognises, quite correctly, that the divine nature is incomprehensible and ineffable, and so denies that He is, properly speaking, truth. Negative theology despoils the Godhead of all the attributes with which It is clothed by positive theology. The one says "We can speak of God in this way," but what it does not say is "God really is like this." The other says "God is not like this," though it is possible for us to speak of Him in this way.<sup>1</sup>

Negative theology does not destroy positive theology, nor vice versa. When the one attributes a quality to God, the other refines on its meaning and bearing. When the one denies a quality, the other limits the negation. But this refining, this limiting, is only possible by the simultaneous use of both theologies, for both are true.

We should note that the whole purpose of denial is to affirm more strongly. What is denied is that God is "goodness" in our narrow meaning of the word. But thereby God is affirmed as superessential goodness. "Super"—a formula dear to Erigena, expressing (in his own eyes, most happily), the exact nuance, the precise measure of our knowledge of God. It suggests not "nothing," but excellence.

<sup>1</sup> P.L. cxxii, 461.



All intellects seek after You, and always at one and the same time they both find You and are hindered from finding You. They find You in these theophanies where You appear in multiple guises, as if in mirrors; in the way that You permit us to know You, not as You are, but as You are not, and in Your existence. They cannot find You in your superessential nature, through which You surpass and exceed any intellect that moves and raises itself up to know You. To these you grant, in an ineffable way, the presence of Your apparitions. You leave them far behind because of Your excellence, beyond compare, and the infinity of Your essence.<sup>1</sup>

We must notice, however, that negative theology, just like positive theology, can be the product of reason. On careful reflection, we recognise that God must necessarily out-distance all we can think of Him. But usually negative theology is a grace, a form of that wisdom from on high of which we spoke earlier. It is something from heaven which imposes itself, and silences the reasonings of reason. "Never," writes William of St. Thierry in his *Enigma Fidei*, which seems to owe so much to the great Irishman, "never in this life does the human intelligence understand the Divinity better than when it recognises that it passes all grasp of our understanding. Silence is the attitude in which we ought to honour the reality of God."<sup>2</sup>

What has been said here is not intended as a résumé of Erigena's system, but simply to draw attention to the religious and mystical content of the work of a theologian too much ignored, and a thinker too little known and hard to get to know. If the truth be told, to grasp the full interest of Erigena's system one must have pored over the spiritual writings of men like St. Bernard (who has intellectual moments which recall Erigena), William of St. Thierry and Isaac de Stella.<sup>3</sup> In our familiarity with the *docta ignorantia* and the *Cloud of Unknowing*, it would be easy for us to dismiss Erigena's theory of mystical knowledge, as outlined above, as a banal rehash of old ideas; it is so easy for us to go back to the Pseudo-Denys. And certainly the Dionysian citations of Thomas Aquinas, and his commentary on the *De nominibus divinis* put Erigena completely in the shade. But he

<sup>1</sup> P.L. cxxii, 1010.

<sup>2</sup> P.L. clxxx, 426, 423.

<sup>3</sup> It will be enough to refer to Hourlier's edition of William of St. Thierry's *Traité de la Contemplation*, Sources Chrétiennes, Vol. 61, Paris 1959, pp. 41-6 and *passim*.

still remains the pioneer of strictly Dionysian ideas and formulae in our Christian West. Erigena was discredited; and this is another factor which has closed the eyes of many to the undeniable influence he had on the Middle Ages. A bold, somewhat subtle theologian, he was a servant of the Lord with a burning thirst for God and His Truth. And we are moved when we come across his powerful impact in the pages of the great saints and spiritual writers three centuries later. It is proper to invoke his memory.

## JOHANNES JØRGENSEN

By

W. GLYN JONES

THE MENTAL CLIMATE in Denmark at the end of the last century was not essentially different from that current in much of the rest of Europe, more especially, perhaps, that of France. The age of Romanticism was past, and a search had been carried out for a new message, a new philosophy, which could bring back life to a literature which by 1855 was doing little more than re-echo the thought of a past generation. The creation of a new literature which, under the influence of Darwin, was bound to come in any case, was hastened by Georg Brandes in his lectures on "Main Currents of European Literature in the Nineteenth Century," in which he called for a revaluation of literature in Denmark, and more particularly laid down the principle that the sign of life in a nation's literature is that it puts problems under debate. This principle more than any other has been decisive in fashioning Danish literature since that time; Brandes is still a controversial figure, to a very great extent responsible for the radical element in Danish literature, while negatively he has without doubt much to do with other tendencies.

It was not long after the publication of "Main Currents" that a new and intensely living literature did in fact appear in Denmark, and, indeed, in Scandinavia as a whole, Brandes's influence

being for instance at least partly responsible for such outstanding works as the social dramas of Ibsen's second period. Names in Denmark immediately associated with Brandes are Jens Peter Jacobsen, Denmark's first naturalist whose creed was expressed in the sentence "There is no God, and Man is his prophet!"; Holger Drachmann, the sole lyric poet of the early days of the movement, whose views varied from socialism to extreme conservatism; and Henrik Pontoppidan, Denmark's greatest novelist, who remained independent and radical until his death in 1943. The subjects discussed by these men and others like them were religion, politics, morals, marriage and a host of other "conventions" which they hoped in time to break down. In the 'eighties and 'nineties a second generation of "liberal" or radical authors emerged, many of whom accepted the principles laid down by Brandes but reacted to the unpoetical, naturalistic prose which his immediate followers had of necessity produced in their efforts to achieve photographic precision in their presentation of reality. Accepting none of the conventions the naturalists had abolished, they came under the influence of the French symbolists and produced a wave of lyric poetry of extremely high standard, in which, as they put it, they endeavoured "to express the inexpressible in words." They were all poets searching for a meaning in life, while denying the philosophies of an earlier age, and so in time they were attracted to humanism, pantheism, spiritualism and various non-dogmatic forms of religion.

One of these poets, and in many respects their leader and critic, was Johannes Jørgensen. Born in the coastal town of Svendborg in Funen he was the son of a seaman. As a child he was most under the influence of his mother, and it was she who fostered the lyric and religious strains in him. Despite his accepting for a time the liberal philosophy of Harald Høffding when he went to Copenhagen at the age of sixteen, he never completely freed himself from Christianity, and it was only for a relatively short time that the thoughts of Høffding, Darwin and Brandes seemed sufficient for him to base his life on. After a period as a journalist on various radical newspapers and the publication of several volumes of poetry and some short, introspective novels, which taken together indicate his increasingly positive attitude towards Christianity, Jørgensen became editor of the periodical *Taaernet* (The Tower), the organ of the Danish symbolist poets, in which

his preoccupation with religious questions becomes steadily more apparent.

To analyse Jørgensen's reasons for becoming a Catholic is a well-nigh impossible task as long as his diaries are not available, and even if it were possible to study them it is doubtful whether a completely satisfactory answer could be worked out. In his autobiography, an abridged version of which is available in English under the title of *Joergensen*, the writer himself sets out to demonstrate that his conversion, indeed the whole of his life, was ordained by Divine Providence, but at the same time he tries to trace back all the threads. Ultimately the cause is almost certainly to be found in a combination of his own personality and the time in which he lived. As a young man he was fired by the idealism of Brandes and his movement, and in Copenhagen he tried to live up to these ideals until he realised that this new creed led him (and others) to nothing but debauchery. The idea of the liberation of the ego which resulted from Brandes's teaching, led not to a lofty heroic expression of the noblest attributes of unfettered mankind, but to a sordid search for pleasure and sensual enjoyment, to lust and drunkenness. This, at least, is the picture Jørgensen draws of his early life in Copenhagen both in the autobiography and in the series of short novels already referred to. Whether his life in reality was as debauched as he likes to claim it was, is perhaps a point which can be discussed. Certainly the picture he paints is not so sordid as that conveyed of Bohemian life in some of the more "realistic" novels of the period; and his friend and contemporary Sophus Claussen has indicated that their life in those early days was not so bad as all that. But the standards which he and Jørgensen later came to demand were most certainly different. Be this as it may, Jørgensen certainly *conceived* of his life in Copenhagen as being empty, meaningless and sinful, revealing to him the complete failure of the Brandesian un-ethics—a failure which, as he advanced in years, he was to see Brandes himself tacitly admit as he renounced his liberal ideals and devoted his energy more and more to the study of the great men of history.

In other words, Jørgensen, a youthful idealist, has seen his ideals leading to a set of morals of which he can in no way approve, and therefore comes to recognise that the ideal he has chosen is the wrong one. At the same time, he occupied himself with the

problem of the Absolute and with metaphysics, which the radical movement had chosen to disregard; finding the Darwinistic solution to life unacceptable, he tried to find a metaphysical solution, though as yet merely incorporating this into a personal system rather than accepting any recognisable form of religion. It had to be a personal system for the time being, because he was unable to accept either the Lutheran State Church or the Methodism to which his mother subscribed. The various "systems" to which he alludes in the autobiography indicate in this respect a return to the speculations of his very early youth, when, he tells us, he evolved a system based on Zohar, Schulkan Aruch, Dionysius the Areopagite, Agrippa and Swedenborg. He was then fifteen years old, and considered himself to be an "esoteric and eclectic theosophist"! Later he was to move through Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Mill, and to start including in his reading a number of lesser French Catholic apologists.

It was while engaged on this passionate search for moral and metaphysical truth that Jørgensen made the acquaintance of the Jewish convert Mogens Ballin and the Dutch artist Jan Verkade, also a convert. It was especially Ballin who led Jørgensen in the direction in which he saw he ought to go, introducing him to the works of people such as Léon Bloy and Ernest Hello, canalising, as it were, the tumultuous processes which were going on within Jørgensen's mind. A considerable time was, however, still to elapse before he was able to accept the authority of the Church in whose teachings he saw the answer to those questions which had so long occupied him. He was finally received into the Church on 6 February 1896.

Danish Catholics at that time were very few in number, every Dane until 1849 being *ipso facto* a member of the State Church, although foreigners were allowed to practise the Catholic Faith. An impression of the minute Catholic congregations at the turn of the century can also be gained from the autobiography, where Jørgensen tells how on one of the great Feasts he was sufficiently close to a relatively large town, Horsens, for him to hear Mass there. He made the journey, expecting on arrival to find a sizeable church and a large congregation, but finding instead a tiny, quiet chapel with a few people gathered together. As a Catholic writer he was in a unique position in Denmark, sufficiently well known for his conversion to have awakened interest and for his Catholic



work to be faced with a hostile reception, if in fact it was published at all.

It is greatly to the credit of some publishers in the country that Jørgensen's work did indeed appear, and in no small quantity—his rate of production increased considerably after his conversion, ten books being published in the ten years before it, but sixteen in the following ten years, and of these sixteen, only one was a volume of verse, the others being works of specifically Catholic content. Some were polemical and could therefore be expected to sell because of the stir they were likely to cause; others were of a much less sensational nature—stories of conversions, impressions of Rome, Catholic novels and stories. In addition to this Jørgensen edited a Catholic periodical, *Katholiken*, and worked as a journalist. His reception was, as might be expected, mixed but largely hostile, the radicals disliking him because he was a Christian, the Lutherans because he was a Catholic—but he made no sign of compromise, conceded nothing to either party. It must be admitted that he was passionately fond of writing polemics, and a past master at the art. He even went so far as to use *Katholiken* as a vehicle for his own private feuds, a habit which was partly responsible for his being instructed to refrain from answering any attack on him for the space of ten years. He respected the ban, but throughout his life loved to write in polemical fashion, admitting on one occasion that he could best defend a cause by attacking its opposite. But it seems that even in this early work he was not writing polemics merely for their own sake, but was practising what Chesterton was later to formulate when he said that no Catholic should write a book in which it was not perfectly plain that he was a Catholic. Jørgensen went even further than this; he was not satisfied with an implicit Catholic expression, but deliberately took upon himself to write of his Faith with the enthusiasm of a man dedicated to a great task, the purposefulness of a moralist and, not least important, the imagination of a poet—it is not usually sufficiently appreciated that he was a poet and remained so throughout his life even in his prose works.

Scandinavia has in the course of the past one hundred and fifty years produced a considerable number of authors whose output has been prodigious; Danish names which spring to mind are Grundtvig, Hans Andersen and Brandes. Jørgensen belongs also



to this category. Ignoring his vast correspondence and his diaries (something like 1,100 small volumes), neither of which has been published or is likely to be, he attempted almost every conceivable literary genre—novels, short stories, parables, travel books, essays, biographies of all sizes, polemics both religious and political, numerous collections of poems and an autobiography encompassing seven volumes, besides many translations and forewords. His journalism and literary criticism form a chapter on their own. In all of these, though least in the poems, he made a positive and explicit defence of his Faith; how great his influence has been in Denmark is impossible to estimate, but there can be few Danish converts who have not in one way or another been moved by him, as is perfectly plain from a book published in 1958 in which twenty-three Danish converts write of their reasons for changing their faith.

Despite the extraordinarily varied nature of his work there is a striking consistency in all he has written, a constant stress on certain aspects of Catholicism which either appeal to Jørgensen as a person or as a moralist. The moral content of Christianity is one of the aspects he insists on most; he has had personal experience of what it means when Christian morals are forgotten or neglected, and he knows what problems their neglect created for him. He feels, or knows, that others must be in the same dilemma as that in which he once found himself, and that they, as well as many who accept modern trends without question, should be made aware of the dangers of a secularised world. Christian love has been replaced by lust and self-seeking, he asserts in his autobiography, going on to point out that the Middle Ages were the time when true Christian love was to be found. This is one of the themes in which he takes most delight: his books on the Saints emphasise it either directly, as in *St. Bridget of Sweden*, or indirectly as in *St. Francis of Assisi*. He loves in his travel books to tell of the medieval ideals he still finds in Franciscan Italy. Christian charity is one of the essential themes in the biography of Don Bosco. And this theme, close to his heart, he exploits in his indirect criticism of Denmark. In his early book *Roman Mosaic* (Romersk Mosaik) he is constantly contrasting the cultures of Italy and Denmark, and his polemical description of social conditions in Italy after the Risorgimento is without doubt aimed at Denmark, where a vociferous movement was advocat-

ing exactly the same sort of reform that had been carried out in Italy. And here, to make his point, he skilfully makes use of Brandes's own words on the subject—the moralist and polemicist are combined, as so often happens. In the same book he complains that naturalism in Germanic literature, and therefore also in Danish, is further from Christian morals than anything in the Latin world. Even Zola's *Nana* is "based on a philistine moral system; the author castigates vice, paints a dreadful picture of drunkenness, reveals immorality—all by dint of his Latin love of truth and sense of reality." Whereas southern European authors depict reality as it is, Nordic writers revel in this sordid reality; they idealise it and foster a new paganism.

Other parts of Jørgensen's moralising are far more concerned with practical matters—he emphasises them especially in *St. Bridget*, perhaps because of the demoralising influence of the Second World War. Here he talks of a monk who died "exultans in Domino" and draws the comparison between this and a pilot in the war being shot down, exulting, if in anything at all, only in the fact that he had scored a direct hit. Birth control is discussed in the same book; so too is abortion; both these discussions being occasioned by an otherwise insignificant event. Christian behaviour between individuals is dealt with and contrasted with the way in which people accept invitations to dinners and then spend their time afterwards discussing their hosts. Throughout his production there is scarcely one phase of human behaviour which he omits to discuss or mention in some connection or other. Perhaps some of his remarks may be considered to be out of place (certainly scarcely anyone else would think of including them at these particular junctures)—and yet they contribute to the character of Jørgensen's work; they add life to it, and give it relevance to the present day.

As a critic, too, Jørgensen took the moral content of a book into consideration, and in doing so is one of the very few in Scandinavia to do it with success. This does not by any means imply that he was narrow in his criticism or only based his judgment on the moral content; on the contrary, he is entirely awake to the purely aesthetical sides of literature, but he is also of the opinion that the moral content of a work should take its place in the evaluation of it. Perhaps we can here see the influence of Ernest Hello again, who deals with this very subject in his

book *L'homme*, a work to which Jørgensen often refers and from which one of the relevant passages is quoted in an article in *Taarnet*. The role played by the moral content is without doubt one of the reasons for Jørgensen's enormous enthusiasm for a writer such as Robert Hugh Benson, and also for both French and German authors who are not normally accorded places of pre-eminence in literary histories.

Not far removed from Jørgensen's addiction to moralising is a remark to be found in a newspaper article he wrote in 1932 in which, talking of two young Danes, he says that the friend of one of them "is no longer in the land of living (as is normally said of those who in truth are alive—living the all-important, final, *eternal* life—the life on which everything depends)." Moralising—yes, but more than that, for we are now approaching the theme of *memento mori*, which is another constant one in his work, whether it be in the biographies or in the travel books, occasioned, perhaps, by a visit to the catacombs, or even in his scathing attack on the Germans for their treatment of Belgium during the First World War. It appears in *St. Bridget* when he talks of "the gospel of worldliness" which sees to it that folk have a magnificent funeral with all the trappings, but are completely indifferent to what happens immediately before it; it is implicit in the preoccupation in the same work with visions of judgment. Death—Man's inescapable fate, which seems to worry modern Man so little—is one of Jørgensen's *leitmotifs*. How to live life in such a way as to avoid Hell, as he puts it in *St. Bridget*, was once the concern of all men; he is trying to open the eyes of modern men, perhaps especially the modern Dane, to precisely this problem. He sees Man in a dilemma of which he is not aware, and he undertakes to draw his attention to it.

And as he essays to force problems of this nature on to people, he also undertakes another task—that of making Catholicism understood among his countrymen. Although many Danes have chosen to regard Jørgensen's work as belonging to European rather than purely Danish literature, he was in many respects writing specifically for Danes, his work being liberally sprinkled with allusions to a cultural background which can only be appreciated to its fullest extent with at least some knowledge of Danish life and traditions—although this should not be taken as indicating that foreigners have any difficulty in understanding him,

as would be the case with many other Danish writers; the number of translations bear witness to the way in which Jørgensen has been valued outside his homeland. Perhaps one can draw an analogy with Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, of which Andersen said that although they were written for the children, he knew that mother and father would be looking over their shoulders, and so they must contain something for them, too. Jørgensen deals with a wide cultural background, and as such is comprehensible to a very broad public; some of his books are aimed mainly at a Catholic audience; but all are written in the knowledge that they will also be read by many Danish non-Catholics, and so they contain something of special significance for them, too, whether in the form of allusions in order to illustrate some point, or of special explanations which from the point of view of many other nationalities would be superfluous. Thus he manages in a unique manner to combine the specifically Danish with the general European. The defence of Catholicism he writes for the Danish readers is not basically theological, although he explains theological points as they arise; nor is it a logical or consistently developed defence. He merely takes, in the apparently spontaneous manner which characterises much of his work, any subject which occurs in the course of the book. It might simply be a defence of monastic life—and not merely a defence but an explanation of the conception and its history; it might be a disquisition on Perpetual Adoration. In one of his early books on Rome—*Roman Mosaic*—he includes a long discourse on the catacombs, and uses them as one of the proofs of the ancient tradition of the Catholic Faith. In *A Journey to Jerusalem* (Jorsalafærd) a visit to Bethlehem leads to a section dealing with the question of whether there really are such things as angels, what their function is, and how one is to conceive of them. And in the same book he includes the evidence in favour of the traditional site of Calvary and the Sepulchre. These questions, great and small, are scattered throughout Jørgensen's work to form a true mosaic. Taken separately they seem to have little pattern; seen as a whole they form a chaotic but impressive composition in which one can discern a unity of sorts.

Yet Jørgensen was not merely a moralist and apologetic, however great the roles played by these two elements in his work are. Nor is he merely a biographer and hagiographer, excellent and

profound as his studies of the saints are. He is above all a poet who even though he has put his poetic gifts at the service of his Faith, expresses himself in all his work, and supplements his objective knowledge of the things of which he writes with the imagination and intuition of the poet he is at heart. His saints are in a way conceived in his likeness, and he underlines the qualities in them of which he has had personal experience; in dealing with the conversion of St. Francis he is thinking of his own conversion. St. Francis and St. Catherine of Siena are depicted among other things as poets, as "God's minstrels"; Jørgensen is striving after the same ideal. St. Bridget is pictured as a Nordic personality who has lived the greater part of her life in Italy and become Italianised; so has Jørgensen. And while the broad conception of these saints is one of which the author has intuitive knowledge, so scattered events in their lives remind him of similar happenings in his own life, in much the same way that scattered episodes in other works start him explaining his Catholic Faith. Both must be considered basically as digressions, but digressions the significance of which is essential to the book. So, as St. Bridget says good-bye to her son as she sets out on a pilgrimage, Jørgensen is reminded of his departures from his family in Denmark. And as reminiscences crowd the biographies, so, too, they appear everywhere in the travel books (which are really again less travel accounts than an apparently disorderly array of memories and impressions—and related subjects which they throw light on). *Roman Mosaic* describes his first day in Rome and contains a sketch of the room he has there—and this produces a crowd of memories connected with other rooms he has known in Italy, their characters and the views he has enjoyed from the windows.

It is almost inconceivable that any author could fill his work with a greater number of widely different elements, most of them in the form of digressions—and digression occasioned by digressions! It is Jørgensen's natural manner of writing, but a manner of which he himself is very much aware—so much so that at times it develops into a mannerism. Yet precisely these diverse elements give his work its unique character and raise it above the level of ordinary apologetics or biography or travel descriptions. It vibrates with the personality of its author, his deep piety, his enthusiasm, his love of his own country and



sorrow over the moral state in which he sees it. It tells of the author's personality, his struggles and his aspirations, though it only betrays them to the full to those who are specially attuned to him. For those who can read him in the original it glories in the language of one whose style must be ranked amongst the finest in Danish. It has been said that Jørgensen was the representative of Denmark abroad and of European culture in Denmark. He was a worthy representative of both.

## THE ENGLISH COMMUNIST MIND<sup>1</sup>

COMMUNISM represents the logical extreme of a materialist social philosophy. One wonders, at first sight, why its dedicated adherents in this country have always been so few. Ultimately, the answer would seem to lie in the fact that it is an extreme. The contemporary Englishman may be something of a materialist, but he is a kindly person, and averse, in consequence, from committing himself to that ultimate in ruthlessness to which Communism inevitably leads. Moreover, it is by no means certain that he perceives the ultimate. His disinclination for logical thinking is proverbial; his approach to the social problem healthily pragmatic. These characteristics combine with a strongly humanitarian instinct to prevent him from carrying his materialism through to its Communist conclusion. Again, his materialism is not based on denial but, rather, on disregard of God. The Englishman has no desire to fight his Maker. His present trouble is that he has ceased to be concerned with Him. Self-sufficiency has always been his vice, but the genuine warmth of his humanity prevents his self-sufficiency from expressing itself in a system which rests on the degradation of man. That is why, despite the radical traditions of the English, their hard-core Communists are few. Their humanitarianism is quite unsuited to the ruthlessness of Communism's social system; their illogical, pragmatic approach unsympathetic to the *a priori* categories of its thought. Dr. Neal Wood has not seen this. It is something, perhaps, of which only an Englishman could be aware.

There have been idealists in the ranks of Britain's Communists, but, for the most part, their Communism has served as an instrument of their burning desire to do something for their fellow men. Few, outside the very tiniest fraction, have given themselves primarily to the Communist system as such; few, in consequence, have stayed with it for long. For most of them Communism was the star to which, naïvely but with great generosity, they hitched the wagon of their

<sup>1</sup> *Communism and British Intellectuals*, by Neal Wood (Gollancz 215).



young hopes. They cared little about its colour. The great thing was that it shone, reflecting, so they thought, the ardour in their own hearts. For most, after a generous beginning, realisation began to dawn—gradually, at first, and then with what seemed sickening speed. There came a point at which further adherence to Communism was made impossible because it meant abandonment of the very ideals which had led them to embrace it in the first place. The reaction of England's Communist intellectuals to Hungary is a case in point. Another is furnished by the mood of a previous generation at the end of the tempestuously ideological 'thirties. "Instead of the oasis of escape from the wasteland which the British intellectuals believed they had discovered in Communism, they found only a mirage concealing a desert of hatred, intolerance, deceit and conformity. Richer by the experience and by the understanding that there was perhaps no easy escape, they retreated whence they came." It is to their credit that they did so.

The repetitive nature of this reaction would seem to indicate a species of contradiction inherent in the English attitude to Communism. The generosity which leads the ardent to it turns them, in the end, against it. The crisis-point comes when it is seen as a system opposed, in essence, to the idealism of its English enthusiasts. At this point, Communism is recognised as naked power, a Leviathan run by technocrats, the demi-paradise of power-driven scientific minds. It is a far call from this kind of nightmare to the splendour of John Cornford's dying in Spain. To read his "Full Moon at Tierz: Before the Storming of Huesca" is to be reminded of Rupert Brooke, not the Moscow underground. He and the others with him, who gave their lives so generously for what they thought was right, were not responding to the call of a Marxist imperative, but to an instinctive passion for freedom which goes deep in the hearts of their countrymen. Had they known the real nature of Communism, they would have been the first to repudiate it as the enemy of everything in which they believed, for which, so tragically, they thought they fought and died. Had Stalin won the day in Spain, John Cornford and his friends would soon have been in concentration camps.

The fact of the matter is that these young Englishmen were not really Communists at all. Ardour and compassion made them careless of the instrument with which they chose to try and redeem themselves and their world of the 'thirties. At the end of it all, the Second World War found them once more disillusioned, in retreat upon themselves. Another generation followed in their footsteps, to be disillusioned in their turn by the Hungarian tragedy. Meanwhile Soviet Russia remains; a State increasingly creedless, fast becoming a technocrats' paradise. The ragged revolutionaries whose impulse, at least, was

moral, though misplaced, have been replaced as its supporters by the type of social scientist whose only desire is to manage mankind.

One wonders whether Khrushchev's present policy is not dictated by an astute realisation that, on the plane of what might be called social engineering, Soviet Russia and the West have far more in common than is usually supposed. The best of Dr. Wood's chapters is that devoted to the appeal held out by Communism to a certain type of scientific mind; those who wish to fashion society in the name of a scientific ideal, ruling it as H. G. Wells wanted his "Samurai" to do. In its materialism and its craving for power, this type of mind is greatly attracted by the freedom of Russia's rulers to do what they will with their people; to discount personality in the interests of a Wellsian Utopia; to turn scientists into a highly favoured class outside the law. Increasingly, if these have their way, as the materialistic ideal becomes more endemic, the ideal of the West will be contained within the framework of technocratic man. Provided it is imposed humanely and with gradualness, there will be increasing acceptance of the kind of world which leaves less and less scope for personality. The outcome could be a materially comfortable but soulless Leviathan very close to that likely to result ultimately from Soviet Russia's present endeavour to establish herself as the undisputed leader of the modern scientific age.

Were this identity achieved between the systems of East and West—and it is not improbable that it might be—Soviet Communism would have gained, through peaceful competition, a victory no war could ever bring her now. She would have conquered the world in the guise of technocratic man. That, I believe, is what Khrushchev sees. His supporters in the coming struggle are not the idealists of the 'thirties, but the social scientists and engineers of tomorrow. They are the real Marxists because the desire of so many of their number is to shape their fellow men in the image of themselves.

PAUL CRANE

## THE ACHIEVEMENT OF EDMUND BISHOP

THIS is an immense and erudite book,<sup>1</sup> crammed with details of the life and thought of Edmund Bishop and strengthened with extracts from the notebooks of this "Prince of Liturgists."

Bishop was a Victorian convert who failed to become a Benedictine

<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Work of Edmund Bishop*, by Nigel Abercrombie (Longmans 70s).

and became a liturgist who ranks with Henry Bradshaw and M. R. James. There was no honour or position for him in England, but he enjoyed the profound admiration of all who appreciated liturgiology on the Continent.

Anchorite though he was, Bishop struck out in controversy with other liturgists, beginning with the famous Guéranger, whom he considered only a "passionate partisan." Guéranger represented "fairy-tale history" and the reaction against Bishop's liberal ideas. As for Mgr. Duchesne, his was "the supreme treason, the prostitution of scientific method for the sake of a thesis." Dr. Brightman of Oxford fared no better, since he used his criticism "for the purpose of underpinning Anglo-Catholicism."

Bishop played an important but unobtrusive part when the question of Anglican Orders was being debated by puzzled Cardinals in Rome. Everything that is of real value in Gasquet's works was drawn from his advice and information. What Horace Round was to feudal studies and Lord Birkenhead to political controversy, Edmund Bishop was in the smaller arena of liturgical dispute. Like them he was magnificently well-informed, utterly fearless and of immovable determination once he had seen what he believed to be the truth. He was extraordinarily generous with his collections and notebooks, handing out priceless information to deserving disciples. Gasquet's best book, *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries*, shows "again and again that the vivid touch and the unfamiliar fact were due to the unselfish friend." The Regius Professor of History in Cambridge writes in the Foreword: "Gasquet had precisely the qualities that Bishop lacked and in the long run the latter probably owed to Gasquet more than he gave, for Gasquet was not capable of receiving the rarest qualities of Bishop's mind."

No contemporary could correct Bishop's work and today there must be few people who can write an all-embracing, authoritative review of Mr. Abercrombie's book, or who can add to his detailed knowledge and perceptive analysis of Bishop's mind. Even the great Provost James would have stared rather bleakly at an examination paper based on the multiple and meticulously detailed liturgiology collected here, paragraph upon paragraph, running to five hundred pages.

A continuous thread of biography runs through the book. Bishop is seen as a dedicated book-worm who was finally to die amidst the magnificent collection of books which he left to Downside. The Jesuit Fr. Thurston was his friend more on their shared academic ground than for personal reasons, but Bishop had many close friends, most of them monks, but also one Anglican Dean, Robinson of Wells.

It is interesting to see here, because it is very little known, that

Bishop was bitterly distressed throughout the Modernist crisis. Like many laymen of the time he had cherished the movement of Catholic Intellectualism. The index of this book gives the names of those whom he mixed with; Fr. Antrobus of the Oratory, Canon William Barry, Dom Cabrol, Dom Connolly, and laymen like Robert Dell, Everard Green and the great scientist St. George Mivart; and the Pope under whom he felt happy and by whom he was appreciated was Leo XIII. Although Dickens's name appears three times in the index, *John Inglesant* was the novel he loved.

Mr. Abercrombie's book is primarily a prolonged treatise on liturgiology, although it also contains a commentary on English Catholic life during the period, but not one in a hundred Catholics or Anglo-Catholics will know how to read this great but specialised work. Anyone who works his way through the volume with pencil and paper will, however, have added a new science, and a most unusual one, to his collection.

Bishop had a quite extraordinary ability to decipher manuscripts and see faint or erased words. He read a manuscript as a living creation; not only as a local specimen of art but as a reflection of the time in which it was compiled. An intensive study of old Mass-books in the British Museum, in France and the Vatican made him by 1895 "master of the history of the Roman Missal in almost every ascertainable particular."

The general view that he bequeathed to scholars was that the Roman sources of the liturgy are imbued with the "Roman spirit, frigid and unmoved before the enthusiasm by which the Eastern or the barbarian mind was carried away." Gallic warmth and energy, the Celtic, or Irish, attitude towards rite and devotion, and what Bishop calls "Spanish Symptoms" have all had their effect on the Roman, the Gelasian and the Gregorian Mass-books. Antiquaries, propagandists, cranks and great but often deluded scholars have embarked on a study of these subjects and have foundered on some difficult point. Bishop stood firm and very few others gained his approbation. There was G. F. Forbes whom he valued as highly as E. Ranke, and there was Lesley, the author of a book on the Mozarabic Rite, but Duchesne's theories were under continual fire.

There is a great deal of solid scholarship amounting to heavy reading in this book; Benedictines will be edified and informed by hearing it read aloud in their refectories for the next decade, and they will learn much about their own excellent scholars in domestic controversy. There are some lighter touches, however, such as his views on Catholic biography, when he likens Purcell's *Manning* and Wilfrid Ward's *Newman* to Miss Bates recounting Jane Fairfax's letter in *Emma*.

Time and again as we see in the chapter "From Cerne to Bosworth,"

his immense erudition and his genius for guessing correctly were brought to bear on solving a mystery associated with some great manuscript, and he gave decisive knowledge to a nation which had not even heard of his name. The Book of Lindisfarne, for instance, is a familiar treasure in the British Museum, but how did an Italian Lectionary with St. Januarius get into a Gospel book "which was unquestionably made at Lindisfarne about the year 700"? Bishop's answer was conclusive; he spotted the Neapolitan descent of a book brought into England by St. Adrian who accompanied St. Theodore when he came to Canterbury in A.D. 668. Now Adrian was an Abbot in Naples.

To come nearer our own time, it was Bishop who gave the historical stroke which settled the question of Anglican Order *qua* Orders. He pointed out that the answer must be found in Cardinal Pole's papers, since he had been the first to deal with the confused situation which has existed to the present day. A single letter printed on p. 155, gives a luminous résumé of Anglicanism from Elizabethan times to the French Revolution, beginning: "The history of the Anglican Church always seems to me the history of an evolution—an evolution in the Catholic sense (I mean towards Catholicity) not from causes within but by pressure from without." Bishop had no use for empty controversy and unfounded accusations; he went straight to the sources and wrote down an account of what had happened according to contemporary manuscripts and books. Both Romans and Anglicans accepted his evidence as authoritative.

Bishop came of that great scholarly race which Browning described unforgettably in *The Grammarian's Funeral*. Just as the Grammarian had finally settled certain Greek particles, Bishop settled Cranmer in his unassailable masterpiece *Edward VI and the Book of Common Prayer*. He knew where to look and found Cranmer's correcting hand in manuscript; he found signs of the new Anglican Breviary ("Quignon but made up of scraps of Sarum") and then the new Prayer Book, half Latin and half English, with the old hymns. One could look further on to the present day when the present Anglican Bishop of Southwark is hoisting his standard on the Prayer Book of 1622 and turning out a clergyman for using too much of the original Latin. One can look from a debate in the Lords on a Bill for Edward VI's first Prayer Book to the recent debate in the reign of George V when the House of Commons rejected the new Prayer Book prepared by Cranmer's hedging successor, Dr. Davidson.

Bishop studied and shed light on the darkness of the period between the seventh and the tenth centuries; sometimes a single sentence contains the compressed wisdom of a volume. For instance he writes about Roman theology, the stark, legalistic religion of the central See of the



West, "for me, in general, Spain is, for the West, the cradle of the cult of the Blessed Virgin as Gaul is in respect of the dogma of Transubstantiation—the seed-bed, so to speak, in each case."

His work flourished where most liturgists were defeated and historians failed to penetrate, for, as he wrote to Dame Laurentia of Stanbrook, "*most history is simply lost.*" Edmund Bishop provided light where all was dark before: his biographer has now given us the necessary illumination to follow slowly in his footsteps.

SHANE LESLIE

## REVIEWS

### LUTHER ON THE COUCH

*The Young Luther*, by Erik Erikson (Faber 25s).

THIS is an unusually interesting and important book, by one of the most scholarly and original of the American psychoanalysts. It is to be hoped that many theologians and historians—Protestant and Catholic alike—will examine, dissect and comment on it, at length and at leisure.

The English and American languages have developed on such divergent lines that good English and good American writing are nowadays very different things. Conceding even that, Erikson's style is clumsy and difficult, even to the point of obscurity in places. For example, he uses the word "ideological" sometimes in the conventional current usage, sometimes as meaning "ideational," at other times "conceptual," and on occasions in a private sense difficult to define. He also juggles perilously with that blessed word "existential." Furthermore, the use of unfamiliar plurals such as "insights" and "behaviours"—so much favoured by modern psychoanalytical writers—does not make for elegance of writing. However, it would be unwise to be put off by minor blemishes of this kind.

Erikson is not so much interested in attaching psychiatric labels to the young Luther—was he a manic depressive, an obsessive-compulsive neurotic, an epileptoid psychopath, or what-have-you?—as in tracing his development in terms of the depth-psychological formulations of Freud, and in deducing the effect of these psychic determinants on the theology of his earlier and later years.

According to Erikson, young Luther's greatness (dynamically speaking) resulted from his struggle to establish his *identity*, not that it is altogether clear what exact meaning the author attaches to the concept of identity. However, it is obvious enough that Luther's brutal, ambitious, alcoholic father thrust Martin's developing psyche into such a constricting strait-jacket that deformation of character and



purpose was inevitable; nor was there a courageously loving mother in the picture to loosen the cruel tapes, for Frau Luder seems to have been a crushed and ineffective wife and mother—hence, perhaps, the banishment from Protestant theology of the “female principle” in the person of the Mother of God.

This book is by no means a Protestant hagiography; for the author is uncompromisingly frank about his hero's shortcomings. Yet, one has the strong impression that, if Erikson could accept any kind of supernaturalism or divine revelation (perhaps he does), he would turn out to be a staunch Lutheran. He certainly does not pull his punches in his references to the Catholic Church of the Renaissance or to the Catholic “establishment” in general.

Erikson constantly draws analogies between Martin Luther and Sigmund Freud (the latter possibly being the author's true hero and repository of loyalties and beliefs). According to him, it was Luther who created an entirely new climate of thought and conceptual framework for man by loosening the crippling bonds of sterile scholasticism, Augustinian and neo-Aristotelian; and Freud completed the good work by converting his day and age into a psychological, as opposed to a philosophical, era. Incidentally, Karl Marx had, prior to Freud, replaced *homo sapiens* by *homo oeconomicus*. Luther, Marx, Freud—are they responsible for modern man's search for a soul in the Atomic Age?—possibly.

Erikson writes: “Luther's theology contains an unsolved personal problem which is more accessible to psychoanalysis than is the theology itself.” This may well be true (I think it is); however, in the last analysis, it is for the theologians to decide, but they must have some knowledge of psychoanalysis as well.

E. B. STRAUSS

#### THE ENGLISH EREMITICAL TRADITION

*The Life of Christina of Markyate; A Twelfth-Century Recluse.* Edited and translated by C. H. Talbot (Oxford University Press 35s).

IT IS A GREAT WONDER that this volume should ever have been published, since it is based on a manuscript, Cotton Tiberius E. 1, which was badly charred in the disastrous fire of 1731. So badly, indeed, that Horstman was compelled to acknowledge that it would be “impossible to decipher.” So much for human prediction! Here is the document almost completely deciphered by Dr. Talbot with the aid of ultra-violet-ray photographs and the skill of Mr. Christopher Hohler of the British Museum.

And what a salutary experience it offers the historian: to encounter a detailed and doubtless authentic portrait of a historical character after

having built up and cherished a rather different picture over the years. For I must confess that references to Christina previously available had led me to imagine a much gentler, less masterful young woman, a twelfth-century forerunner of Lady Julian, perhaps. So much for the historian's imagination!

Christina was born, probably between 1096 and 1098, at Huntingdon of a good Anglo-Saxon family that had branches over the whole of the county. As a young woman she had to resist an attempt to seduce her made by the notorious Bishop of Durham, Ranulf Flambard. The next eight years of her life were spent equally sensationally in attempts to escape from the marriage into which she had been forced by her parents. Before she eventually secured her annulment at the hands of Thurstan, Archbishop of York, she had managed to throw a fair number of distinguished ecclesiastics into confusion, to say nothing of the puzzled citizens of Huntingdon. And in spite of the comic-opera quality in some of the incidents one is bound to admire the tenacity with which she pursued her vow to fulfil her vocation as a virgin. One has no difficulty in believing her anonymous biographer when he assures us that it was characteristic of her family "to pursue to the bitter end anything it had begun."

But for Christina the end was far from bitter. After living for a score or more years as a recluse at Markyate under the protection of the great monastery of St. Albans, she founded at Markyate a priory of nuns. The sicknesses, which had beforehand caused her constant pain, now cleared away with astonishing rapidity; and despite the fact that her biography stops before her last years, there are plenty of indications that she had by this time come to terms with herself and was exercising peaceful and beneficent influence upon the widening circle that had come to admire and revere her.

And though there is little in her life to arrest the historian of spirituality in the way, say, that he is arrested by the purity of vision displayed by the Cistercian Ralph Haget later in the century, this biography does bring out very clearly her position in the eremitical tradition of the English. It seems, as one reads it, as if there were English hermits to be encountered at almost every turn of the road. And when one remembers Christina along with St. Wulfric of Haselbury and St. Godric of Finchale, one is struck by the manner in which those of English, as opposed to Norman stock, so frequently turned in this time of their subjugation to the eremitical life. And as in the lives of other English saints, so in Christina's the most memorable phrase is a phrase of English embedded in the Latin. Here we read how her protector Roger used to describe her as *myn sunendaeghe dohter*, that is, my Sunday daughter. How reminiscent of the dying Ailred's falling into English—for *crist luvē*.

It remains to say that Dr. Talbot has written a most helpful introduction and provided us with an attractive map of the Markyate locality. But for some unknown reason he has not given us an Index; and he is not consistent in his rendering of English names (e.g., Edwin, Eadwin, Burhred, Burhtred).

DONALD NICHOLL

#### MORE ABOUT FRANCIS THOMPSON

*Francis Thompson Man and Poet*, by J. C. Reid (Routledge 25s).

*The Real Robert Louis Stevenson and Other Critical Essays* by Francis Thompson, newly identified and edited by Terence L. Connolly, S.J. (University Publishers Inc. \$10.50).

OF FRANCIS THOMPSON the man there is not much to be said; of Francis Thompson the poet surely a great deal. Mr. Reid finds a great deal to say about both. That he should disapprove of the man is understandable; very much less acceptable are his strictures upon the poet. Let us see what the grounds of his disapproval are. It is not that Mr. Reid objects on what are called sectarian grounds (though he does suggest that, for example, the opening of the "Orient Ode" may be incomprehensible to any but Catholics), but rather that as a Catholic poet Thompson is unjustly held in higher esteem than either Hopkins or Patmore. This is a perfectly tenable point of view which is only somewhat weakened by Mr. Reid himself when later on he says: "At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that five or six poems of Thompson have become part of the heritage of English poetry, and that for every one person who knows a line of Donne, Crashaw, Mangan or James Thompson [*sic*] there are thousands for whom many lines of Francis Thompson are as familiar as lines of Shakespeare." Then on the question of the laudanum. It used to be the fashion among those who wished to detract from the poet's reputation to imply that all his best work was due to the influence of the drug. Now it appears that the effect of the drug is not to stimulate but rather to have an opposite and soporific effect: nor is it deadly in its results, and may even in this case have acted as a palliative to the disease—consumption—which was finally to prove fatal, and prolonged the poet's life for several years. Therefore another explanation must be forthcoming which turns out to be that it was from the state of nervous tension caused by his being deprived of the drug that his poetic imagination received its stimulus. But it is rather his criticisms of the poems themselves that give cause for astonishment. Is it really possible to say of two such poems as "A Corymbus for Autumn" and the "Ode to the Setting Sun" that they are like "a quiz-kid astonishing adults with his knowledge of the dictionary," and that "the result is a spurious magnificence impressive mainly to those who have not read much

poetry"? This is "high-hat" criticism with a vengeance. And why is the rhythm of "To the Dead Cardinal" an instance of the writer's "startlingly defective ear" and "quite unsuitable for his subject"? If there is anything startling there it is on the contrary the very appositeness of that drum-beat rhythm to so solemn a theme. Moreover to dismiss what is perhaps the greatest of all the major poems, the "Anthem of Earth," as "stupefyingly ornate" is a shot completely wide of the target. And in the line:—

Whose passion frets my spirit's deepening gorge,

what better word could there be than "frets"? It is in its context the exact descriptive verb. But to Mr. Reid it shows a lack of poetic control! Instances also of the derivative nature of many of Thompson's images are trotted out on the one hand, while on the other he is accused of anticipating Roy Campbell. But enough has been quoted to show that there is a good deal of the querulous critic about Mr. Reid. Granted that Francis Thompson was not a poet of impeccable taste; granted that he could lapse on occasion into mawkishness; granted also that his tendency to polysyllabic utterance sometimes ran away with him: nevertheless, granted all that and more, he still remains, as Chesterton said, a figure standing apart from his day and generation, and a force, not only in the sphere of poetry, which is yet to be reckoned with.

Fr. Connolly is the Librarian and Curator of the Thompson Collection, the largest collection of books and manuscripts relating to the poet in existence, at Boston College, Massachusetts. In this volume he has made a further compilation of Thompson's prose writings, for the most part book reviews. It is interesting to read the poet's views on his contemporaries (he only died, after all, in 1907), and we see him giving an approving pat on the head to the young Lord (not Sir, p. 112) Alfred Douglas and the young W. B. Yeats, saluting Tennyson and writing a critical essay on *A Shropshire Lad*. For these last-mentioned poems he evidently had a great admiration since, writing of Alice Meynell's *Later Poems*, he went so far as to say: "These poems have moved and stirred me more deeply than any others read for the first time in recent years, with the possible exception of *A Shropshire Lad*." But he was not deceived by the philosophy underlying them. "They could only have been written by a very sensitive poet with a vital unbelief in the future life." At the end of this book is added a complete bibliography of Francis Thompson's contributions to periodicals, a most valuable compilation which will not be found elsewhere.

JOHN MCEWEN

## THE SPIRITUALITY OF CORNELIA CONNELLY

*God Alone: An Anthology of the Spiritual Writings of Cornelia Connelly, Foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus* (Burns and Oates 2s).

**G**OD ALONE is the appropriate title of this booklet, which contains 150 extracts from the writings of Mother Cornelia Connelly (1809-1879), the foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, the cause of whose beatification was opened by the Bishop of Southwark, Mgr. Cyril C. Cowderoy, on 15 December 1959. The motto *Dieu seul*, in accordance with a practice familiar among religious, frequently headed her correspondence. It was the true expression of her positive will and an apt description of the last thirty years of her life.

The extracts are grouped principally around the subjects of vocation to the Church, vocation to the religious life, and vocation to sanctity. The editor in a biographical conspectus that is compelling in its restrained sympathy and readable by its brevity and lucidity shows how the aspiration embodied in the words *God Alone* was worked out by God through the circumstances of Cornelia's life, because she unfalteringly embraced His will in every trial and situation, as it arose.

These comprised tragedy, bereavement, betrayal, scandal, humiliation, and disapproval in their most painful and acutest forms. So much so that good people condemned her—and possibly still do—under the impression that they were the result of misconduct on her part and that trials, sent from God, must be "respectable" trials.

As a result the victim was left very severely alone; and this desertion by creatures enabled her to fulfil the ideal of *God Alone* to a degree that human ingenuity and a self-planned programme of spirituality could not have achieved.

Mother Connelly's writings as presented here will offer no satisfaction to those who may be seeking primarily or unconsciously either spiritual novelty, purely human profundity, academic discussions or self-revelations of an otiose kind, epigrams, subtlety, or any straining after originality or effect. Such intellectual distinction as she possessed is revealed primarily in her educational aims and syllabuses. The reader will not, however, be disappointed of a well-turned phrase or an arresting thought here and there. These extracts, though essentially practical, are not baldly prosaic; nor, whilst not lacking in unction, are they officiously pious.

This selection from Mother Connelly's writings is, of course, published with the approval of the Southwark Diocesan Promoter of the Faith.

L. E. WHATMORE



## SHORTER NOTICES

*Erasmus and the Humanist Experiment*, by Louis Bouyer (Geoffrey Chapman 18s).

ERASMUS remains an enigma, and we still await the major work which will solve the riddle of his incongruous personality with its strangely combined balance of judgment and sourness of mind, pietistic upbringing and forthright intellectualism, charming wit and bitter polemic. The spirituality of the *Enchiridion* seems shallow, the admiration for Christ too purely ethical, but Erasmus was so often right in matters requiring considerable spiritual insight that it is difficult to maintain that he simply substituted intellectual acumen for other spiritual values. On matters of theology, as Cardinal Gasquet has said, the orthodoxy of Erasmus both in intention and in fact cannot seriously be disputed.

The English title of Fr. Bouyer's book may mislead. Two or three essays on Erasmus follow quick sketches of the attitude of the papacy towards the Renaissance and on "humanist" theology from Nicholas of Cusa to the *Encomium Moriae*. The core of the book is a brief but convincing refutation of the views of the late M. A. Renaudet whose learned researches were linked with the view that Erasmus was impulsively and deliberately heterodox. Fr. Bouyer's defence of Erasmian orthodoxy is cogent, and it is difficult not to admire the shrewd political foresight and integrity of judgment of this lonely scholar, urging counsels of sanity and probity, advising moderation with the reformers and pleading for the reform of theology and morals within the Church.

The series of Renaissance character studies is stacked into what is called a "genealogy of minds," giving the erroneous impression that the Renaissance inevitably led to paganism, and Fr. Bouyer, leaning heavily on von Pastor and Burckhardt, rather underestimates the strength of the spiritual currents of the period. In style the translation is sometimes poor and there are some distracting aberrations in the spelling and accentuation of foreign words, names and titles.

*Guide for Living*. Selected Addresses and Letters of Pius XII, edited by Maurice Quinlan (Pan Books 2s 6d).

*Man*. Extracts from the Teachings of Pope Pius XII, translated by Michael Chinigo (Methuen 3s).

NO MODERN POPE has spoken as much as Pius XII. Few have spoken so appositely. His great achievement was to show the message of the Church as entirely relevant to the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the Vatican's translation service was rarely as modern as the



Holy Father's thought. Some translations that appeared in the English Catholic weekly press were appalling, and involved to an almost unintelligible degree. There has never existed in this country anything approaching the excellence of France's *Documentation Catholique*. The English lost a great deal of what Pius XII said because it was badly translated; there was, at times, almost too much of it and, not infrequently, the late Holy Father's style was tortuous.

One wondered what would happen after his death; whether his words would be made available in assimilable form or whether they would remain inaccessible to most. Two books just published show that an attempt is being made to bring them before a wide public. The publishers deserve our thanks. Under the title of *Guide for Living*, Pan Books have produced at 2s 6d a selection made by Maurice Quinlan from a wide range of Pius XII's writings. Methuen have published at 3s his collected teaching on the subject of marriage. Why they have called it *Man* we cannot quite see.

These two publications represent a very good beginning of what we hope will be an attempt so to translate and present Pius XII's thought to the British public that it is easily available to all.

*The Family Clinic*, by John L. Thomas, S.J. (Newman Press \$3.95).

AS AN AUTHORITY on the family and its problems the author of this book has a reputation as wide as the United States and it is certainly deserved. Fr. Thomas is not the ivory-tower type. His knowledge is profound; but it is sharpened and kept practical by contact with people. A glance at the book under review is sufficient to show this. There are answers given to the problems accompanying just about every aspect and stage of married life. They range from the morality of "necking" and "petting"—the author is an American—to the difficulties experienced by wives whose husbands read only westerns or who find themselves landed with their sisters' bills. There are hints on how to keep busy at forty, on the regulating of children's television, curfew time for teenagers and the morality of dating divorcees! Truly, there is no limit to the adaptability of the Jesuit mind! Quite seriously, the answers given by Fr. Thomas to his range of problems are first-class. The only trouble with this book is its awful price.

*The Greek Tragic Poets*, by D. W. Lucas. Second edition. (Cohen and West 24s).

THE FIRST EDITION of this book (1950) was deservedly praised for its attempt to elucidate the central themes of the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides by presenting them within the

framework of fifth-century political and social preconceptions. In this new edition Mr. Lucas has developed this sane approach by a more extended survey of the religious background from which Tragedy should never be wholly dissociated. In this and in the minor changes in other chapters the author's reputation for never overstepping the available evidence is preserved. This book can be bracketed with Kitto's *Greek Tragedy* as the most useful of recent general treatments in English of the Greek Tragic Drama.

*The Study of Greek Inscriptions*, by A. G. Woodhead (Cambridge University Press 22s 6d).

MR. WOODHEAD, Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, has put to very valuable use his year's leave of absence at Princeton. During the last century the volume of unearthed Greek inscriptions has steadily mounted. Failing the happy discovery of a second Oxyrhynchus, this inscriptional evidence will undoubtedly play the major part in any future reinterpretation of ancient historical problems. The two-volume *Introduction to Greek Epigraphy* of Roberts and Gardner has hitherto been the only guide in English to the science of Greek epigraphy, a book both long unobtainable and too technical for the beginner. Woodhead's more modest survey presupposes no knowledge of the subject.

Very wisely, the quite separate problems of Mycenaean epigraphy are here by-passed. The epigraphy of the Classical period is treated first by an outline of the conventional symbols used for transcription; there follows a summary of the epichoric alphabets of various regions of the Greek world. The sections which follow on classification and dating of inscriptions might have been abbreviated, for there is much which will be obvious here, even to a beginner. Perhaps the most immediately useful chapter is the practical advice on how to make a "squeeze." The book ends with a useful collection of miscellaneous information, which includes a summary of Tod's analysis of the alphabetic and acrophonic numeral systems.

*Racine: Confessions*. Unpublished Sonnets, translated by W. Roberts (Mowbray 13s 6d).

IT WAS KNOWN that Racine, not long before his death (1699), wrote some sonnets expressive of contrition, but they existed under the name Eustache Le Noble. In 1914 Mme Rosita established their true origin and form, but they had not appeared hitherto in English. And really, we might ask: Why should they? Anyone interested in them would surely be able, and prefer, to read them in French, especially as Mr. Roberts agrees that his undoubtedly very skilful version is an

"interpretation" of their spirit and a "creative" one at that. We think, however, that the dismal tone of the sonnets is authentic, and represents Racine's semi-Jansenised mind (his aunt Agnès was abbess of Port Royal); a full conversion should be lit up with "love, joy, peace in the Holy Ghost," as these sonnets are not. Still, it was a true one, and must not (despite the final group) be put down to a wish to consolidate his return to favour with Louis XIV.

*A Defence of Free Learning*, by Lord Beveridge. (Oxford University Press 18s).

FROM 1933 onwards a series of organisations have been created to help men and women of University standard, expatriates on various grounds, first to survive, and then to pursue and develop the special line of learning or research which had been theirs at home. The first stream of such refugees came during the Hitlerian persecution and was partly due to Hitler's insane anti-Semitism; but under the imperialist tyranny of Russia the bedevilment of pure learning is infinitely further spread. But while we are glad that 2,600 expatriates of this class have been helped in this country (in spite very often of bureaucratic obstructionism or sheer laziness), we cannot but ask ourselves whether the enormous efforts spent in ensuring the help being given in time, and of a really suitable kind, might not be given with a deeper sense of humanity to those "hundreds of thousands" who have no claim to being regarded as "scholarly." Well, provided all are making a real sacrifice, let each act as he sees best. But what we shall never admit is the spending of colossal sums upon "works of art," however beautiful, whether for private possession or public exhibition. Like every problem in the world, this ends by being a moral one, and how conscience has been trained.

*Light in Silence*, by C. Koch (Gollancz 16s).

THE *Ordo Servorum Mendicantium* had existed for some seven centuries, but the College of St. Bardolph, on the American side of the Niagara Gorge, for only one: its Community numbers twenty. We confess to not understanding the objective or organisation of this Order; it consists of Brothers with a priest as chaplain. The Brothers are said to inherit a great number of venerable traditions; yet they seem remarkably free both in speech and in movement. When the book begins, the Prior has just died: this kindly, other-worldly man had turned the modest College into something much grander; more unwisely, he had accepted as a Brother a certain Joseph, whose widowed mother had offered him her little son because she was so poor, though the Prior and soon enough Joseph himself

knew that the boy had no vocation. After twenty years Joseph met the sister of another Brother: she was a widow, happy in her children. This, together with the prospect of a Prior more worldly than the last, decided Joseph to escape. He does so, but very soon sees he cannot stay away. We think this last part is hustled. The "atmosphere" of this College seems to us too emotional and disturbed, as if the rushing waters below them were tossing human minds about: and if Joseph did not have a vocation before his flight, when and how did he discover the one that brought him back? For us, the agitation of minds has its effect upon the author's style, though the serenity of the old mystic Didymus is sympathetically conveyed.

*Physics of the Stoics*, by S. Sambursky (Routledge 23s).

PROFESSOR SAMBURSKY of Jerusalem deservedly won recent acclaim with his *The Physical World of the Greeks*. This second book will consolidate his reputation as interpreter of Greek science, the more so because he has the courage and original insight to oppose the current of popular histories of ancient thought. The contributions of Stoic logic and ethics have unfairly overshadowed those of Stoic physics, which at last receives just tribute as a "highly original and consistent system of physical concepts," which anticipates basic scientific ideas of to-day, especially the continuum theory.

The book embraces four essays which examine Stoic physics from Zeno to Posidonius (c. 300-50 B.C.). In the first, *The Dynamic Continuum*, the author examines the concept of *pneuma*, the mixture of air and fire which the Stoics believed possessed a property of tension to cause matter to cohere and even to generate its physical qualities such as hardness, solidity, brightness. The second section, *Pneuma and Force*, analyses the theories of communication induced by the *pneuma* between the organs of sense and the *hegemonikon*, the ruling soul. This "tensional motion" Sambursky compares with the modern concept of "wave propagation"; and *hexis*, the structure of inorganic matter which coheres because of the presence of *pneuma*, is similar to a field of force. Thus "the Stoic doctrine of *pneuma* was the first consistent and elaborate continuum theory of matter." Democritus' atomic theory had failed to envisage that continuous interaction which Stoic physicists postulated.

Of especial interest is the third essay, *The Sequence of Physical Events*, showing that among the Greeks the Stoics made the greatest advance towards a doctrine of causality. The Stoic doctrine of *heimarmene* (fate) is seen to reside on physical premises far more reputable than the Epicurean *clinamen*. There are useful comments, too, on the Stoic justification of divination, which is ultimately the principle of har-

mony between macrocosm and microcosm. Clearly this carefully-documented book must cause in the textbooks a revision of ideas too long accepted because unexamined.

*Diocesan Priest Saints*, by R. A. Hutchinson (Herder 30s).

WE THINK it was an excellent idea to collect thus some names of secular priests who have been canonised or beatified or may, we hope, some day be so. We might wish that the word "secular," used by Rome (*clerus saecularis*) had been used instead of "diocesan," which sounds somehow restrictive and local, whereas the former is popular and indeed normal. Fr. Hutchinson excludes even bishops and founders of Orders, and we think "Parish" would be adequate. No matter. The secular clergy are a necessity in the Church, and religious Orders are not. The late Holy Father (8 December 1950) has made it quite clear that neither state of life is "ahead" of the other so far as vocation to holiness goes. The relatively greater number of canonised religious is not to be regarded, we hold, to a mere "flight" from worldly comforts, not to a greater "generosity," but often to the ability of a widely spread Order to publicise the virtues of its members, and possibly to afford the enormous expenses of canonisation. Fr. Hutchinson has shown great industry and historical knowledge in collecting, even so, only a few examples of secular priests placarded by the Church as saints. Some are quite modern (Bd. Noel Pinot, guillotined, 1794, still wearing his Mass vestments); none from before the earlier Middle Ages. Each has a characterising note (for example, "The Priest and Loneliness—Bd. George Napper"); each is followed by a brief spiritual commentary. An excellent gift for every Ordinand; and, we hope, a great and needed stimulus to the priestly vocation.

*Liturgical Latin*, by Christine Mohrmann (Burns and Oates 15s).

IN THESE three published lectures, delivered at the Catholic University of America, Professor Mohrmann traces the development of the language of the liturgy, and analyses its stylistic features. She believes that her *exposé* has important implications in the Latin-versus-Vernacular controversy. For it is perfectly clear from her study that this Latin is not a simple and colloquial language of communication, but hieratic and obscure in expression. The early Christians of the West in fact deliberately sought to avoid the language of everyday speech. The author believes (and here her American audience is a relevant consideration) that the Western languages, as they move towards greater efficiency in communication, are increasingly disqualifying themselves for "sacral stylisation."



This is a forceful argument, but the Vernacularists may well retort that the search for efficiency is a common evolution in language; and that if these arguments were carried to a logical conclusion the early Christians should have retained Greek, and the Greeks Aramaic. The basic argument for Latin must be the *vinculum unitatis*, which Miss Mohrmann rightly reminds us is vertical as well as horizontal, spanning fifteen centuries to preserve a living element of the Church.

However, it would be a pity if this excellent book became merely ammunition for a controversy. Professor Mohrmann's learning in this field is virtually unique, and her exposition lively and attractive. She illustrates how the Greek of the Septuagint, most uncharacteristically for the Hellenistic world, differentiated itself from the vernacular by retention of Aramaic diction and sentence-structure; and then how, after earlier experimentation, liturgical Latin was evolved in the fourth century, owing much to pagan sacral formulae and the rhetorical Classical style. Finally, there is a fascinating analysis of contrasting stylistic features in the Mass—as seen in the Orations, the Preface, and the Canon—and the poetic features of the *Praeconium Paschale*, with amusing detail here of Jerome's condemnation of the Vergilian bee *motif*. One cannot imagine a priest or liturgically-inclined layman who would not enjoy or profit by this splendid book.

*The Thirteenth Apostle*, by Eugene Vale (Gollancz 18s).

THE AUTHOR of this novel sets out to tell a morality tale. His theme is the salvation of a human soul by suffering, a grandiose theme dealt with in a grandiose way. The hero is a middle-aged American consul in a small South American port. He is a widower, set in his ways and a trifle smug in his outlook, the realisation of which with its implied betrayal of the idealism of his youth gives him a feeling of guilt from time to time. The arrival of a patently non-conformist and disturbingly outspoken individual, a painter called Crispian, has the effect of rousing this hitherto suppressed guilt complex, and when Crispian makes off through the jungle to a remote village the consul—his name is Webb—such had been the impact of the man's personality on him, makes it his duty to follow after him as rumours of his death were current. A chance meeting with a travelling priest, Padre Paolo, enables Webb to traverse the jungle safely and reach the village where after a deal of mystification, he learns that Crispian, after painting an enormous picture of the Crucifixion, has gone on up a mountain, El Soledad, to a further village near the summit. Webb finds the picture, which contains likenesses of most of Crispian's acquaintances, Webb himself among them who is represented as a Thirteenth Apostle—one who has been called but

not chosen. The centre of the canvas, however, featuring the Figure on the Cross, has been cut out and is reported to have been taken by the painter up the mountain. Fearfully but determinedly Webb sets forth with Padre Paolo as guide on the further stage of his journey. During the ascent of the mountain, which is described in hair-raising detail and interspersed with flash-backs from his earlier life, he redeems his past and has the satisfaction of knowing that at last he has been chosen as well as called.

This book, rather like Crispian's picture, which, we are told, unrolled round four walls of a room, is on a large, not to say elemental, scale. That and the somewhat laboured symbolism involved may not be to everyone's taste. But of the sincerity of the writer's intention there can be no doubt whatever.

*Children's Bible.* Translated from the German (Burns and Oates 10s 6d).

**W**ELL-PRODUCED with clear type and vivid illustration (which should attract the modern child as cave-men were attracted by their contemporary artists), this book is more suitable for presentation than as a textbook. The translation is good and the brief summary of Bible History is chronologically presented. Brief indeed it is, since the period from David's death to the birth of Christ is condensed into eleven lines. Chapter headings, entitled "The good works of God and the evil ways of man," seem to stress mainly the punitive action of an offended Majesty. The dramatic appeal of the Bible is conveyed only by the illustrations which are often crude, though full of design and rhythm.

*Children and Priest at Mass,* by Hubert McEvoy, S.J. (Oliver and Boyd 5s).

**A** REALLY HELPFUL MASS BOOK which should make children happily alert throughout their Sunday Mass. Parents will find it easy to make the little ones keenly attentive if they use the methods suggested here, where the children have something definite to do from minute to minute. The book is clearly printed and the photographs are excellent. A mental lapse on p. 40 explains the cross on the shoulders where obviously the cross on the lips at the Gospel is meant, but this is the only fault in this otherwise perfect little book. Rarely nowadays is such good value offered for five shillings.



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ONE of the great occupational risks of business life under the pressure of to-day is that the practical man of affairs neglects his outside reading, and all too easily falls into a narrow circle of immediate preoccupations. There is always loss in this, and the Catholic business or professional man, as a member of the Church Universal, has a particularly strong reason for keeping his mind open to wider horizons. Certainly it was never more necessary than now to follow world happenings. A direct chain of causes and effects ties every business to economical changes in the world, which are themselves as often the consequence as the cause of changes in men's political and social ideas. These ideas in their turn come out of the religions, or irreligions, of contemporary man.

In many countries the Catholic Church is at the heart of the battle of ideas. Cardinal Manning's saying that "all great quarrels between men are at bottom theological" suggests that there is, in fact, no better starting-point or background for understanding the modern world than a Catholic one. Because of this approach and background

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